

PROVIDING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR GIRLS IN EARLY PUBESCEENCE  
TO DISCUSS THE DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGES  
OF PUBERTY AND ADOLESCENCE

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## ABSTRACT

### PROVIDING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR GIRLS IN EARLY PUBESCENCE TO DISCUSS THE DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGES OF PUBERTY AND ADOLESCENCE

by  
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The project was conducted at Mount Ararat Baptist Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Prior to the project this church did not provide a ministry to help girls transition from childhood through adolescence and puberty. The hypothesis, then, was that developing a ministry for this purpose would generate awareness of God, self-esteem, and positive body image in young girls. Data was gathered using a qualitative approach, and the methodology consisted of small group training sessions, pre and post-tests, and questionnaires. The girls showed an increase in knowledge of what God says about them and in knowledge of human developmental changes.

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## **DEDICATION**

This project and subsequent ministry work is dedicated to every young girl of color who is navigating through the years of puberty and adolescence. My prayer is that you will find that the church is the place where you can ask the most uncomfortable questions, learn that God loves every part of you, and that he created you and said that you are “Very Good,” meaning He outdid himself with creating you. May you know that God purposely created you and that you are not a mistake or an afterthought no matter how you arrived on earth or how your experience has been since arriving on earth. May you learn that you are fearfully and wonderfully crafted by God.

This project is also dedicated to every woman who was told by her parents not to get pregnant and not to have sex. However, those parents and churches did not have the conversation with their children about puberty, adolescence or changes in their body. My prayer is that parents, other adults, and churches will realize their responsibility and provide an environment where girls can have the conversation so that no other female or male navigates the developmental years without truth, love, and openness.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Bible says in Proverbs 22:6 “train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.” For too long young people have not had the training they need to properly navigate through the most important years of their growth and development both naturally and spiritually. They have not had training in the area of natural body growth and development or puberty. They also have not had it in a way that helps them understand God’s role in it. These are great issues and when not addressed results in many issues throughout a person’s life, from health and hygiene to relating with other people, especially the opposite sex and daily life decisions.

The title of this project is, “Providing an Environment for Girls in Early Pubescence to Discuss the developmental changes of Puberty and Adolescence.” During puberty there are a lot of natural changes that are occurring. The years of puberty and adolescence consist of mental, physical, and psychological changes that need explanation and understanding. Puberty brings multiple changes in the body as well as changes in the mind that cause psychological changes. The changes that occur should not be navigated solo because, too many of the changes have life altering consequences. Many questions come during this time, along with curiosity and intrigue, all of which is good and should be welcomed. Unfortunately, these years of development are not always welcomed and young ladies have not always supported in their experience. They are met with responses to questions of inquiry about their bodies as if to learn, discuss, and

process natural body changes are taboo. This has resulted in girls seeking answers from other young people, community members, and society. Unfortunately, in many instances these young girls are seeking answers from other youth who are also seeking answers, or from a community or society that does not value them or the God that resides in them. In some instances, girls are falling prey to predators who count on their lack of knowledge about their bodies in order to take advantage of them. The church should be that place where girls learn about these developmental changes because it is the place where the girls are being taught about God, and his creation of humanity and His purposes for them. It is also the place where girls are learning how God wants to commune in relationship with them through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the perfect place for girls to learn about the intricate nature in which God has fashioned and formed them, and made them wonderful and beautiful.

Because this project provided an opportunity for girls ages ten to thirteen to learn and discuss adolescence, puberty, and all the changes happening in their bodies in an environment where truth is spoken with love from a biblical world view the girls learned that they are wonderfully and beautifully made by God, and that they are temples of the Holy Spirit purposed by God to do phenomenal work in the earth. Through this project girls learned how to safely and appropriately navigate through the developmental years by learning how to care for their health and hygiene, be aware of the changes that are supposed to happen, and by learning that girls change at different rates; no two girls are typically the same. The girls learned to be okay with learning about their bodies even through uncomfortable feelings. Through this project girls learned to navigate through these changes in a church that is in a world where self-esteem issues are occurring, body

image is a major issue, sex and sexual activity is celebrated and accentuated in mainstream media, but the conversation about puberty is a missing component in the discussion.

This project also provided an environment where girls had support in learning about their bodies in a world where prevailing cultural views of women are both positive and negative and especially for the woman of color. Historically, women have been celebrated as beautiful, however African American women and women of color, have been subject to body shaming, ridicule, marginalization and discrimination. The girls in this project learned that they are indeed beautiful, wonderfully and uniquely made, and that God made them that way on purpose with purpose. As a result, the girls also learned to view themselves as God views them. The girls were taught that they are temples that are worth treasuring, preserving, and celebrating.

The girls gained insight about developmental years that will help them properly navigate attraction and interaction with boys. The provided knowledge on puberty and body changes was designed to generate awareness with the hopes of reducing teen pregnancy, youth engaging in risky sexual behaviors, addressing identity issues, pornographic addictions, and other issues. The girls were able to ask questions about all of the changes that were happening in their bodies in a church setting, and as a result learned that the church is the one place that knows what God says about humanbeings. Further, the church created a learning environment conducive to healthy discussions. The church is equipped for the discussion with the youth because it is a living organism that defines humanity according to the word of God. Therefore, the church can foster open discussion and sharing of what God says to the young generations so that they can

understand and be guided in the right way to navigate through life with praise and thanksgiving unto God.

Chapter One provides insight on the ministry focus as it relates to the synergy between my personal experience and my context. As a youth growing older I benefited from the fellowship, biblical teaching, and accountability that being part of a church and especially a youth group brings. This foundational teaching helped to shape how I dealt with challenges during important transitions in life. One of those transitions was during my developmental years. During my developmental years I did not have the necessary additional support to properly navigate that time, however, my faith in God and the teachings on his word that I received carried me through those years. My current church also does not offer this necessary and very critical support for young ladies navigating the developmental years, but offers the teachings on the word. My experience has fueled a desire to be certain that the next generations of young ladies have the necessary support in the years of life that define and shape who they are for the duration of their life.

Chapter Two provides the biblical platform for the need of the church and especially the believer to be able to express God's unique care of them so much so that he or she is able to proclaim, "I praise you oh God for I am wonderfully and uniquely made and that my soul knows right well". The Old Testament scripture of Psalm 139:14 sets the foundation of understanding that if a person is not able to praise God for who they are and to acknowledge that they are wonderfully and uniquely made by a God who formed them with a purpose and a plan something is wrong and something needs to be done to ensure that this can be the proclamation. Working with young ladies as a church which

understands this and is willing to help the young ladies during the most critical developmental years with the perspective of a loving and creative God is invaluable.

The New Testament scripture is First Corinthians 6:19 and it provides the needed foundation to solidify that our young girls need to know that they are temples of the Holy Spirit and thus gives reason for girls to be taught how to take care of themselves by having the needed support to help them properly navigate through the developmental years of puberty. The church of Corinth had to be instructed by Paul that they can no longer take their cues from the pattern of this world and its purpose for the body, but that they had been bought with a price and were set apart for the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and God's purpose for them. The role of the current church is to help young ladies know about the natural changes occurring in their bodies. Doing so will prevent them from falling prey to the results that seeking support and answers in appropriate places can yield when they are not being supported.

Chapter Three provides the historical foundations, which further supports as to the importance of this type of work being done by the church with young girls. It gives a historical account of the way that women have been viewed down through the centuries of the church and how this helped to create a negativistic view of woman in ministry, and in life. It reaches back to accounts of the monastic fathers and their view of woman as carnal and man as spiritual, which supports the conclusion that woman is not able to be fully pleasing to God in her natural state thus her need to transcend and become more comparable to male characteristics.

Chapter Four serves as the theological foundation for this thesis . Our theological view is simply defined as that which we believe about God. We find that the woman

have been mistreated down through the years by the views of the church. We also find that as a result society had some views of woman as subordinate to men. and this was more true for woman of color. Therefore, the theological foundation explores the womanist theological movement which finds its origins in black liberation theology and feminist theology. All these theologies speak of the God who cares for the plight of the oppressed.

Chapter Five looks at the theoretical manner in which we address having the conversation about puberty and adolescence and changes in the body both in the church and society. In this chapter, we take a look at the way in which different disciplines such as psychology, the church, and schools work to address the need for sex education and helping our young people properly navigate the developmental years. We find a crisis that needs to be resolved through a child's life development as spoken of in the realm of psychology which gives credence to the need to support young ladies at this time in life.

The sixth and final chapter serves as the presentation of the impact that supporting girls during the developmental years has on them. It highlights the knowledge that the young ladies of the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church had before and after engaging in discussion, learning, and processing the developmental years of puberty, adolescence, and changes in their bodies. The girls came to the sessions with a level of knowledge of what God says about them, however, they left with an understanding that God loves and cares for them so much so that he made them with a unique purpose, and that he put himself inside of them to help them to carry out his plan.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

The title of this project is “Providing an Environment for Girls in Early Pubescence to Discuss the Developmental Changes of Puberty, Adolescence.” During puberty, there are a lot of natural changes that are occurring. The years of puberty and adolescence consist of mental, physical and psychological changes that need explanation and understanding. Puberty brings multiple changes in the body as well as changes in the mind that cause psychological changes. The changes that occur should not be navigated solo because too much of the changes have life altering abilities. Many questions come during this time along with curiosity and intrigue all of which is good and should be welcomed. Unfortunately, these years of development have not always been welcomed and young ladies are not always supported in their experiences.

Mount Ararat Baptist Church (hereafter referred to as Mount Ararat) of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is located in one of the city’s predominately African American neighborhoods of East Liberty. It is said to be the largest African American church in Southwestern Pennsylvania with close to 9,000 members. Mount Ararat was established 111 years ago as the result of a meeting held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. H.H. Marshall at 156 Everett Street in the East End now East Liberty neighborhood of the city of Pittsburgh. Mt. Ararat was organized by a council of the Pittsburgh Baptist Association. The church had eight people at its first service and eight people at its

establishment by the Pittsburgh Baptist Association.<sup>1</sup> Mount Ararat was named by one of its members, Mrs. Margaret McDonald Blakney-Moore. According to the membership demographic report provided by Mount Ararat, the name Ararat is the name of the mountainous region between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea where Noah's Ark is said to have rested when the flood waters subsided as described in Genesis 8:4.

Mount Ararat had eight pastors in its 111 years of ministry, with the current pastor the Rev. Dr. William H. Curtis as the eighth pastor. Dr. Curtis was called to the church on November 9, 1997 after serving as the Pastor Elect since July 1997.<sup>2</sup> During his pastorate the membership has increased to over 9,000 members. The weekend services include a Saturday 7:00 pm service, Sunday 7:30 am, 9:30 am and 11:45 am. The church streams two of its weekend services live via the internet. In addition to the four services held each weekend; the church conducts Bible study via small cell groups on Monday and Tuesday at 12:00 noon and in the evening. It has a very highly attended Sunday School for the children of the Mount and a youth ministry which holds its own weekly Sunday Service in the youth sanctuary. The youth ministry also involves young people in ministry such as dance, drama, and singing. The church has also implemented such community outreach programs as the community tithe program, where the church is a blessing to organizations in the community. There is also an annual thanksgiving basket give away, and a complete Christmas make-over including a tree, presents and a complete family meal is given to a selected number of families in the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Phyllis Edwards, *Mount Ararat Church History* (Pittsburgh, PA: Mt. Ararat Baptist Church, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Edwards, *Mount Ararat Church History*.

Mt. Ararat is a church that goes by the motto, "The Ministry that Cares." The church is staffed with a full range of staff pastors; making Mt. Ararat a staff led church. Mt. Ararat takes great pride in their financial stability, accountability and economic growth, which has continued with the current pastor. The church has burned six mortgages over its 111-year history. The church has added a fleet of shuttle style buses that service both the church and the community center. The church has also secured several additional properties within the vicinity of the current church property.

There are two community corporations that were created to serve the community, the Mount Ararat Community and Activity Center and the Mount Ararat Counseling Center. The work of the community center includes an afterschool and summer youth programs, a child development center, and a Youth Café that is operated by the youth of the Mount. The profit from the Youth Café serves as scholarships for the youth who work in it. The Community Activity Center has recently acquired its own building for the offering of its services to the community. The Mount Ararat Counseling Center provides mental health counseling to not only members of the church but the community as well on a regular basis.

Mount Ararat has several ministries with the main ministry arms being, a vibrant fine arts ministry, a youth ministry, a senior ministry and a family ministry including young adults of the church. Mt. Ararat is not only a congregation that is primarily African American, but is also a fairly young congregation with its largest population ranging between the ages of twenty-one to sixty-five. Mt. Ararat Baptist Church is also located in an area of the city of Pittsburgh that has a large population of young adults. The total population of East Liberty is 29,156 of which 15,563 are female. In 2013,

68.8% were between the ages of twenty to sixty-four. The male population within East Liberty registers at 13,593 and 69.8% are between the ages of twenty to sixty.<sup>3</sup>

The sixth pastor of Mt. Ararat was the Rev. Manuel L. Dillingham. He implemented the junior church services in March 1979 and put it under the direction of the only female minister listed this early in the churches history, Rev. Thelma Mitchell.<sup>4</sup> She was raised as a youth in the church.

Even as a vibrant mega church Mount Ararat like all other churches has strengths and weaknesses. Each church has challenges in how it functions and offers ministry through its God given personality. One of the strengths of the church is that it has many creative, innovative and strong men and woman of faith in the congregation who desire to be used by God to do great and mighty things in the church and the community at large. Another strength of the church is that it is a staff led church that also has a very dedicated and vibrant deacon and trustee board (joint board as it is referred to). Many churches do not have full-time staff present at the church on a daily base. Typically, and traditionally you will find in the African American church a full-time pastor who is responsible for every aspect of the church from preaching to cleaning and fundraising.

One weakness or challenge that I have observed Mount Ararat having is communication amongst church staff and ministry leaders. My observation and experience over the past several years has taught the importance of effective communication. There is a lack of consistent and thorough communication amongst leadership and to the overall church. There is not a consistent flow of communication

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<sup>3</sup> East Liberty Commerce Demographic Profile Study Completed: 2000- 2010, 2013 Estimates and 2018 Projections, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, *Mount Ararat Church History*.

from staff member to staff member. For example, Staff Pastors are responsible for managing and implementing policies, procedures, events, outreach, services and the worship experience: however, there are ministry leaders who can serve as extensions to help and they are not being utilized. The ministry leaders can serve in delegated roles to help fulfill the responsibilities of the church staff. Unfortunately, ministry leaders are not utilized to their fullest capacity. The ministry leaders have been asked to submit ministry activity ideas over the past years, however, when they submit them they are not given credit for their submissions or included in the planning or implementation of the activities and ministry events. This has caused resentment and tension amongst ministry partners directed toward church leadership. Some leaders are capable of managing the tension and continue to serve within the ministry. Unfortunately, other leaders do not know how to effectively manage the tension and have departed the ministries to serve at a decreased level or have become disenfranchised from the faith community.

I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior at the age of seven. As a result, I have been an active member of a church since my youth. Since that time, I have significantly grown in spending my life-serving God and cultivating a personal faith walk in obedience to him because of the opportunity at a young age to learn, discuss and process what it means to live with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. I was active in youth ministry up until I graduated from high school. As a child the youth ministry included the Good News ministry for kids twelve and younger and Baptist Youth (BYF) for kids thirteen and older. I had advisors who invited us to their homes and held sleepovers and provided opportunity to talk and discuss what it means to live a life that is pleasing to God in a world that is not interested in God at all. I always saw myself active

in a church even when I graduated from high school and went away to college. This was a result of the opportunity and involvement in church as a youth. Joining a church while in college and participating in the campus ministries was the expected norm. This continued attachment to the ministry of the church and other believers kept me strong in faith and able to meet life's challenges. I was taught that there is great value in living with and for God for yourself. This has also helped me to not become discouraged by the negative experiences that do occur while being involved in a church.

There were challenges that I faced both academically and socially as a youth growing up in my home church as well as while a college student. I'm confident that my outcome would have been different if I did not have the opportunity for learning, discussing and fellowshipping as a child raised in the youth ministry. Being connected to a church ministry and being active gave me accountability partners to keep me grounded. It gave me a connection to learning and growing by the word of God, a safe, comfortable, and loving place to properly process life's experiences, and be of service to other people. The foundation that I gained as a child carried me through my challenges as a child, a college student and even now as a young adult.

The teaching and learning of the word of God helped me understand the concept of communing with the Holy Spirit. I was taught that I have the very present help of the Holy Spirit strongly present in my life, and because of His presence I have not been vulnerable to falling prey to the hardships during transitions in life. The opportunity provided a future reference for processing other challenges presented by the enemy in my life. For example, in moving to Pittsburgh to attend graduate school in 2000, it was an act of faith because I knew very few people and the city of Pittsburgh is much bigger than

my hometown. There were lonely moments and I felt as though there was no one to relate to. During this time, it was very important to pray and ask God for godly and likeminded friends who were living for God at a young age. God sent me friends and they happened to be active in the Young Adult Ministry of the church. We attended and engaged in Bible study, discussions, ate meals together and attended worship services together. The connection was beneficial for everyone and vital to the undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals. The fellowship with the young adults was also vital to single young adults with and without children. Just as the youth ministry did when I was growing up, it gave a safe and comfortable space where we could cultivate relationships and family and could also learn, grow and hold each other accountable. Through this connection we were encouraged to live believing in, seeking and putting our trust in God.

One of the reasons that young people may be staying away from the church may be that there is not a place for them to cultivate and grow. One area that was a challenge for me growing up was that of the developmental years. I did not have an issue with the emotional and physical changes of puberty and adolescence; I had issues with feeling comfortable to ask questions about all of the different ways that I was feeling and getting help with processing what was natural and normal. No one talked with me about the specifics of what happens in my body during the years of puberty. There was not a discussion on the maturing of the reproductive system, and what areas of the body change or how.

During my developmental years, if one inquired about the changes that were occurring, they were made to feel as if they were discussing pornography. For example,

showing diagrams and having discussion was considered taboo. There was not a discussion on how attraction starts with tingling and sensations; we were just told not to have sex. We did not know what sex was so we thought we were wrong for having a sensation when around boys. That made it even uncomfortable to be okay with liking boys because the natural occurrence seemed as though it was taboo. There was a lot of dos and don'ts but no proper holistic conversation stating this is going to happen, this might happen, coupled with why and how to specifically deal with it. This did leave me and other young people prey for wrong information and confusion because of a lack of understanding.

The Bible says in Proverbs 4:7, "The beginning of wisdom is this; Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get understanding." I do not want them to be told that it is not okay to talk about their bodies in church, yet feel wrong when they experience natural sensations and feelings that come with maturing during the developmental years. I want them to know that the church of all places is where an individual can talk in-depth about self in relation to being God's beautiful creations. I want them to feel as though they can ask any type of question and talk about what they are feeling, thinking, or experiencing. I want them to get loving guidance and support as they process through these years of development.

In all of the ministries taking place in Mount Ararat there is not a ministry where we are talking to our young ladies or boys and helping them to properly process through the developmental years of life. Also, there is no guidance provided that helps them understand how important it is to embrace themselves in relation to who God is and how He cares about them. Learning about God and the power of his scripture and having faith

in him was helpful in helping me deal with the results of not having the needed conversation about the developmental years. Some of the struggles could have been avoided if the conversation through the word of God had taken place.

The overall assessment of the current context is that Mt. Ararat is a vital large ministry that is comprised of creative, innovative and talented believers that provides various streams of engagement for all ages to grow, and develop in a relationship with Christ and to minister to the community and the world. The church has made some unprecedented strides throughout its ministry history such as securing land and burning (paying off) mortgage debt, and becoming a staff lead church with full-time, ministerial staff and office attendants that are present to engage in ministry work on a weekly basis. It has exceptional ministries such as the SOAR ministry for seniors, The Health and Wellness ministry for growing a healthy church, Weekly Bible Study Cell Groups for all ages, a vibrant Youth Ministry, Fine Arts Department, and strong Deacons and Trustees Boards. It offers ministry streaming for the ministry of Jesus Christ to the world via weekly live streamed services.

In regard to Christian maturation and Christian development there is one area of the youth ministry in which, the youth ministry could help young people learn about God and his love and care for them in this life. This area lacks helping prepubescent, adolescence and teens properly process through the developmental years of puberty and adolescence. These years are very critical years that are filled with much question and issue, identity development, peer influence, and learning how to gain independence and how to navigate properly as an adult in the world without their parents. The church helping youth to properly transition through these years can be very beneficial in helping

young people identify Christ as their personal savior who is able to help them navigate even hard issues and challenges in life. It can also be very beneficial to helping them establish a relationship with the God who loves and cares for them and created them for a special purpose that is individual and beneficial to the world. A relationship with God helps to keep young people connected with the church beyond youth ministry and into college, young adult hood and adulthood.

This area is the one area where the autobiography and the church context converge and show an area that is critical to helping young people establish a lasting relationship with God that will last a lifetime. It will help the young people of Mount Ararat to willingly make the transition into adult church and to involvement in the church because they will identify God as a God who loves them and created them for a special unique and valuable purpose in the kingdom and world. This ministry is especially needed in today's society where our young people are told to consider everything including those things that are against the biblical world-view. The world may not interpret the biblical view on the developmental stages and the biblical significance in navigating these years; however, the church should be the source in this teaching and discussion.

This doctoral project will explore the impact that providing a ministry for girls in early pubescence to learn, discuss and process puberty, adolescence and changes in their bodies will have. It will also help in the future creation of a curriculum for the use of churches in developing their own ministry for processing girls through the years of puberty and adolescence.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Experiencing the Bible and what God has inspired men to write so that we would be inspired, encouraged, guided, corrected, protected, and our faith made stronger and unwavering is a testament to the powerful, all knowing, mighty and considerate God. The Bible has also been studied and examined by men and women through the centuries for historical and educational purposes. It is an awesome revelation and guide, and is an awesome instrument of history and scholarship. Many scholars have not only looked at the pre-interpreted writings that we now call the “canon” and re-interpreted them so that we can read them, but they have studied land and geographical regions to find the physical evidence of what the “canon” says took place, including dates of writings, language, nature, and cultural norms. The study reflects the excavating of the land to reveal the people, the method in which they lived, worked, interacted, and maintained their homes, how they worshipped and whom they worshipped. The study also indicates the governing structure and the methodology of ruler-ship including who governed or kept rule, and how they ruled in order that we would understand the need for and ultimately the meaning of the sacred text.

God inspired many men to give his thoughts, expectation and his magnificent love in work down through creation to redeem us back to him through the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made on the cross. Two scriptures have been selected that will magnify this

thought. The scriptures will inform our work and faith as Christians. The Bible is to be encountered and experienced; however, the Bible should be done so with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Tiffany and Ringe in *Biblical Interpretation a Road Map* say that the text must be felt, read, and questioned and that we must react to it.<sup>1</sup> In the following pages, the Old Testament scripture of Psalms 139:14 and 1 Corinthians 6:19 have been selected to provide a foundation for the research work conducted in order to answer the problem of the church not offering a ministry for girls to learn, discuss and process puberty and adolescence and changes in their bodies. Second Timothy 3:16 states, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”<sup>2</sup> Just as this scripture admonish the need for the Holy scriptures and the teaching of it, obedience is required and the allowance of the scripture to do its work as believers are trained in the way of truth.

In the following pages a biblical exegesis will be conducted on the both an Old and New Testament scripture that form the basis of the need to provide an environment where training should take place. These scriptures will be evaluated from a personal viewpoint as suggested by Tiffany and Ringe, which informs the reader to ask questions, give impressions and then take a look at what different scholars have said about these texts. A historical synopsis of each book including its name origin, authorship, literary history, genre, a first reading and interpretation along with an outline of the chapter and

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Richard J. Cliford and Michael D. Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Version with the Apocrypha Fully Revised Fourth Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010). “Throughout this document this will be the Biblical translation used unless otherwise noted.”

where the focal scripture lies within it. The historical synopsis will provide insight of the writing of the text and how it helps with the interpretation of the chapter as a whole as well as what scholars have said that will help to give a better understanding of what the specific text says alone and as part of the whole chapter and book.

## Old Testament

The Old Testament text is Psalm 139:14, which states, “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.” The Book of Psalms gets its name from the Greek work “*Psalmoi*,” which means songs played on a stringed instrument. Its contents were said to be hymns that were sung and accompanied by stringed instruments.<sup>3</sup> The Book of Psalms is named after the Hebrew word “*Tehillim*” meaning praises or songs of praises.<sup>4</sup> Psalm is also named after the English word “*Psalmi*.<sup>5</sup> Richard Cliflard in the introduction to the Psalms in the New Oxford Annotated Bible says that in Jewish writings Psalms is the first book of writings and is the third part of the cannon or Christian Bible, which is the poetic books coming after Job.<sup>6</sup>

The Book of Psalms is said to be a composition from various periods in Israel’s history with its final stage between 400 and 200 BC.<sup>7</sup> Psalms authorship is widely

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<sup>3</sup> Cliflard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>4</sup> Frank H. Ballard, Stewart McCullough, and William R. Taylor, *The Interpreter’s Bible: Psalms and Proverbs* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1955).

<sup>5</sup> Ballard, McCullough, and Taylor, *The Interpreter’s Bible*.

<sup>6</sup> Cliflard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>7</sup> Cliflard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

attributed to King David however is noted to be anonymous and from contributions of several scholars and authors. The contributions are said to consist of anthologies or anthologies of anthologies of several collections of hymns that were comprised throughout Israel's history. Taylor, McCullough and Ballard state that even though Josephus prescribed that "David composed songs and hymns to God in varied meters" in his writings it has been considered a Jewish tradition that David was the author of Psalm and as a result it became the heritage of the early Christian church that David was indeed the author. The writings of David in Psalm are also found in Mark 12:36-37 and Romans 4:6-8 and 11:9-10 and attest to this heritage.<sup>8</sup> The Book of Psalm is found in the third division of the Hebrew Bible known as "The Writings" This part of the Hebrew Bible is said to be the last part of the Old Testament to be recognized as Canonical.<sup>9</sup>

Cliffard says that modern translations of Psalms follow the Hebrew numbering system 8-147.<sup>10</sup> He goes further to state that the Greek Septuagint counts number 9-10 and 114-115 as single poems and divides numbers 116-148 which contains the biblical focus verse, into two poems. This is said to create a discrepancy in the Hebrew numbering system.<sup>11</sup> For this reason Cliffard states that the Greek Septuagint is correct in its numbering of numbers nine through ten and forming an acrostic alphabetic psalm.

Psalm is stated to be divided into five parts and four books, which parallel the five books of the Torah or Pentateuch; 1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106 and 107-150.<sup>12</sup> Each book

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<sup>8</sup> Ballard, McCullough, and Taylor, *The Interpreter's Bible*.

<sup>9</sup> Ballard, McCullough, and Taylor, *The Interpreter's Bible*.

<sup>10</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>11</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>12</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

is said to end with a doxology or ending blessing or word of praise. Cliffard states that Psalm one introduces the collection by mentioning the Law or the Hebrew Torah, of the Lord and Psalm 150 serves as a mega doxology and concluding both the fifth part and the Book of Psalm as a whole with all of creation praising the Lord using a wide variety of instruments to coincide with the meaning and name of the book.<sup>13</sup>

As stated above the Book of Psalm is a book of Anthologies of Anthologies. It is also comprised of different types of Psalms such as hymns, laments of the community, royal psalms, individual laments, individual songs of thanksgiving, enthronement songs, and hymns of eschatology, confidence, wisdom poetry, liturgies and prophetic liturgies.<sup>14</sup> Cliffard states that all in all the Psalms are “reflections of human feelings presented before God and expressing them directly concretely and skillfully” and that these psalms “encourage believers to come before God in their weakness and need as well as in their strength.”<sup>15</sup>

Psalm 139 seems to fit very well in with both the 138 and 140 number of Psalm as an even flow of thought and praise. Psalm 140 continues on with the author asking for protection from God from those who would have him not believe in Gods care, love and consideration of him. In verse three the author describes the evil doers by saying that “they make their tongue sharp as a snake’s and under their lips is the venom of vipers” and then goes further in verse four and asks God to “guard me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; protect me from the violent who have planned my downfall

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<sup>13</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>14</sup> Ballard, McCullough, and Taylor, *The Interpreter’s Bible*.

<sup>15</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

Psalm 138 is said to be of David in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* as he gives praises to God and ascribes worth to him for his faithfulness, his steadfast love and for giving his soul strength in verses one through three and describing who he is in verse five, "...the Lord is high, he regards, the lowly..."<sup>16</sup> The number ends with David asking God to not forsake the work of his hands speaking of himself in verse eight, which shifts into the author, possibly David, proclaiming that the Lord knows him and has searched him and has discerned his inner thoughts. It is as though the 139<sup>th</sup> affirms the praise further that was given in Psalm 138.

Psalm 139 is considered by the *Interpreters Bible* to be one of the great passages of the Old Testament; however, it is a book that is hard to classify. It states that it has some of the qualities of a hymn and of a psalm, however, reads like an individual or personal prayer between the author and God alone. Richard Cliffford in the writings on Psalm 139 in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* describes a hymn as "a call to worship."<sup>17</sup> He states that the body of the verse is normally introduced by a "for, because" which gives the basis of the praise. Psalm is a call to worship or at least a hymn of praise with the call to worship taking place in the 138 number of Psalm and continuing into the 139 number of Psalm. It also serves as a petition as well in verses nineteen through twenty-four. Cliffford describes the 139 number of Psalm as a unique individual petition.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cliffford and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>17</sup> Cliffford and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>18</sup> Cliffford and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

Hossfield and Zenger notes as well that the genre of Psalm 139 has been widely studied and questioned as a complaint, thanksgiving, hymn , and wisdom meditation.<sup>19</sup>

Within this passage the author ascribes worth to God and praises God for the fact that God knows him inside and out, that he knows where he is mentally, physically, emotional and geographically and that he created and purposed him on earth. The author goes further by praising God for making him and calls God's work (himself), fearfully, and wonderfully made. He thanks God for who and what he is. He further describes in verses fifteen through eighteen how much care God took to create him and to purpose him on earth. He states in verses seventeen and eighteen how vastly God considered him, when he says, "How weighty are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them they are more than the sand."<sup>20</sup> Just as the hymn writer was able to give God praise because he realized the great care God took to orchestrate him and his whole life, the people of God of that day were encouraged to do the same. The encouragement is that God does not make mistakes, God is purposeful and deliberate in all that God does and has done. The inability to not bless God in this manner could potentially stifle the type of worship that we see the Psalm writer so freely offering to God.

Benjamin Segal in his writings on the Psalms in *A New Psalm: The Psalms as Literature* says that this Psalm is not only about God, but also about relationship with references to God and to the speaker or Psalmist.<sup>21</sup>

#### I. Acknowledgement that God knows him inside and out and is with him (1-12)

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<sup>19</sup> Frank Lothar Hossfield and Erich Zenger, *Psalm 3: A Commentary on Psalm 101-150* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>21</sup> Benjamin J. Segal, *A New Psalm: The Psalms as Literature* (Jerusalem, Israel: Gefen Publishing House, 2013), 653.

- II. Acknowledgement that God created him and he praises Him for who and what he made him to be (13-16)
- III. Acknowledgment of God's vast consideration of him (17-18)
- IV. Petition for God to protect him from the evildoers who speak of God Maliciously and try to keep him from believing that he is fearfully and wonderfully made. (19-24)

Many scholars have studied Psalm 139 and given a precise outline and understanding of this passage and have called the author the petitioner and ascribed this passage as a petitioner acknowledging God's awesomeness and his need for God in the pardon of his sins and for protection from his enemies.

Within this chapter the author takes great care to rehearse what God did when he formed and purposed him, and how it was of great consideration more than the numbers of grains of sand. The author then shifts and asks God to protect him from the wicked and that the bloodthirsty would depart from him.<sup>22</sup> The author in this passage seems to acknowledge that there is opposition coming against him to believe that God has such vast consideration of him that he would form him, know him inside and out, purpose him on earth and know his every move. He asks God to search him and know him and to correct him if or when he finds anything that is contrary to him being able to acknowledge this vast way in which God considers him. In evaluating the chapter, it can be outlined as indicated below: Coomber, Page and Yee state that the Psalmist goes from

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<sup>22</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

meditating on God's thoughts to calling for the destruction of the wicked in verses seventeen through twenty-two.<sup>23</sup>

In verses one through two, David is in a posture of praying to God and qualifying who God is to him. Starting with verse one, he says, "O Lord, you have searched me and known me" and "you know when I sit down and when I rise up." He continues on describing how well God knows him; how he searches his thoughts, and is acquainted with his ways and knows what he is going to say before he says it. He acknowledges the recognition of God's presence throughout his life in every place that he has gone, both heavenly places and hellish places. James Luther Mays in the, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching Psalms* says that verses one through eighteen is praise and that the longer part is indicated by the specific explanation or declaration "I praise you," and by the characterization of the Lord's ways and works as "wonderful."<sup>24</sup> Coomber, Page and Yee in the *Fortress Commentary on the Bible* state that "search me" in verse one reflects a commitment to introspection and self-critique that proves significant after such strident self-identification the psalmist has with God.<sup>25</sup>

In verse ten the psalmist acknowledges that God's hand leads him when he is doing right and when he is doing wrong; for he says "even there your hand shall lead and your right hand shall hold me fast." The 'even there' in this part of verse ten encourages Christians to refer to what was previously stated, "If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea," meaning that there is the "farthest limits of the

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew J. M. Coomber, Hugh R. Page, and Gale A. Yee, *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The Old Testament and Apocrypha* (Minneapolis, MN: W. Derek Suderman, 2014), 592.

<sup>24</sup> James Luther Mays, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching Psalms* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 425.

<sup>25</sup> Coomber, Page, and Yee, *Fortress Commentary*, 592.

sea.” God is still there with him because of this the Psalmist believes that God is not afraid to be with him even in dark places and that God is always with him (v. 12).

McCann in his writings on Psalm 139 in *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary on Maccabees: Intro to Hebrew Poetry, Job and Psalms* helps with understanding verses thirteen through eighteen a little better by reflecting back to verses two and thirteen. He postulates that the author starts the chapter off with an empathic Hebrew pronoun “you” which connotes that God’s activity is emphasized. This empathic Hebrew pronoun which calls attention to God’s activity, when looking forward to verse thirteen through eighteen presents that the creation of the human body is not just a biological or natural occurrence but is “the result of the will and work of a benevolent creator.”<sup>26</sup> This interpretation of the biblical passage is very important for the believer’s consideration when it comes to how we view and embrace who we are in totality and as we compare ourselves as humans often do, to other humans. God took God’s time and made sure that the Psalmist had the eyes that he had, the nose that he had, and the bodily functions that he had and with much consideration for what God purposed for him and for what he wishes to accomplish in his life. Declaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Laneel-Tanner in the *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* indicates that in verses thirteen through eighteen it describes God’s careful creation of the Psalmist.<sup>27</sup> They go further to say that the “Psalm-singer speaks in trust and thankfulness for God’s presence.

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<sup>26</sup> Clinton J. McCann. *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Declaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth Laneel-Tanner, *The International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 965.

McCann looked at the word formed, “*qānā*” in verse thirteen and gave an interesting look at what this word could mean for help with interpreting this passage. McCann says that the verb translation for “formed” is used in other places in the canon to describe God’s gracious activity of constituting the whole people (Exod. 15:16, Ps. 74:2, Deut. 32:6). These passages point back to the emphasis on the people that God created as the people that “you created” giving distinction that they are the works of God and that it is good and awesome.<sup>28</sup> He goes further to say that the use of the same language points to God’s care for every person. He also states that God’s creation of Israel is described elsewhere as God’s wonderful works as it does in verse fourteen. He references Exod. 3:20; 15:11; Ps 77:11, 14. In these passages the author speaks of God’s wonderful works, miracles, protection, and what he does to bring about freedom for his people Israel. McCann also points to the author’s lack of using the familiar description of God as a “potter” as in Jeremiah 18:11 and instead as a “weaver” who carefully “knit” him in his mother’s womb in verse thirteen.

Frank Hossfield and Erich Zenger state that the aim in verse thirteen was not the creation of the body, but the whole person from core outward and that the later part of verse thirteen “adduces the image of weaving as in Job 10:11, Prov. 8:23 as the working of a weaver and their effect on artistic texture with and its comparison to the forming of a human in its mother’s womb.”<sup>29</sup> Verse thirteen really leads into the praise that is given by the author in verse fourteen of the awesomeness of one of God’s expressed works, the

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<sup>28</sup> McCann, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*.

<sup>29</sup> Hossfield and Zenger, *Psalm 3*.

human being. The author, a human being, acknowledging that God created him and that he is well thought out, and fearfully and wonderfully made without mistake, or defect.

McCann also believes that verses thirteen, fifteen and sixteen are congruent with the affirmation in verse fourteen (a) where the psalmist states that he is “fearfully and wonderfully made” in that the psalmist understands that God knows his creation past, present and future and that God knows not only the psalmist origin but that his destiny lies with God.<sup>30</sup> C.J. Collins in his article on Psalm 139:14 expresses that the words “fearfully and wonderfully made,” coincides with McCann’s interpretation and that the author is praising God because he is one of his covenanted people.<sup>31</sup>

When first reading verse fourteen, “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well,” the author seems to be praising God for who God has made him to be and acknowledges that who he has been made to be is truly wonderfully, carefully and strategically made. He believes that God put thought, consideration, and care into what he looks like, how he would function, his purpose and because of that, God deserved his praise and adoration.

The *Cyclopaedia of Biblical Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* defines praise as “reverent acknowledgement of the perfections, works, and benefits of God, and of the blessings flowing from them to mankind, usually expressed in hymns of gratitude

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<sup>30</sup> McCann, *The New Interpreter's Bible*.

<sup>31</sup> C. John Collins, “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made?,” *September Presbyterian* 25, no. 2 (September 1999): 115-120, accessed October 28, 2015, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

and thanksgiving, and especially in the reception of the Holy Eucharist, that sacrifice of praise.”<sup>32</sup>

When looking at commentary on this verse, the word fearfully has been referenced more from the root word ‘fear.’ Declaisse, Jacobson and Lanell-Tanner indicate that the translation of the word fearfully in this text is more likely translated as fear in some translations and takes on the meaning more likely ‘reverently’, and is “*nôrâ’ôt*” derived from the verbal root “*yârê*” meaning fear and gives the understanding as reverence and awe. Reverence is defined as “a respect, submissive disposition of mind arising from affection and esteem, from a sense of superiority in the person reverenced.”<sup>33</sup>

Collins in his article questions the soundness of the common translation of the words in the verse. In specific that there are two of what he calls “interpretive moves,” in regards to the word “wonderfully made.” He states that in the New International Version (NIV) there is no Hebrew text corresponding to the English word “made,” instead there is a rendering in the Hebrew that solidifies it as “I am fearfully or awesomely wonderful.”<sup>34</sup> The second interpretive is that the standard Hebrew interpretation of the verb “wonderfully” takes a form of the word that in the lamed-aleph, which in the Niphal means, “to be extraordinary.” He goes further to say that we find in the NIV that is the

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<sup>32</sup> John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 470.

<sup>33</sup> McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia*, 1075.

<sup>34</sup> Collins, “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made?,” 115.

Niphal of the lamed-he verb, means “to be separated, distinct.”<sup>35</sup> To Collins the lamed-he verb here causes some confusion with an existing lamed-he verb “to be distinguished.”

Declaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Laneel-Tanner point to the Hebrew use of the word wondrously “*niplētî*” which has a verbal root of “*pālā*” giving a meaning of “to be different, striking, remarkable, outside of the power of human comprehension.”<sup>36</sup> Thijs Bouij in his writing on the words in Psalm 139:14 states that the speaker praises God because he has been distinguished, or set apart, and that in a manner evoking awe (nöräö).<sup>37</sup>

In verse fourteen we see the author praising God or reverencing God for his reverent care in creating him to be distinguished and set him apart as extraordinary and strikingly different. The author steps back and acknowledges that he was not just created and set on earth just because, but that great care was taken to fearfully and wondrously make him.

All of the verses of Psalm 139 talk of the consideration that God has for the author, however, verses seventeen and eighteen focuses on that point by putting an awesome description that can be visualized as the reader reads these verses. In verse seventeen the author says “How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum (or total) of them?” In this verse, the author shifts from the telling of how God has considered him to putting a visual and tangible likeness to what he is saying; almost

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<sup>35</sup> Collins, “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made?,” 115-116.

<sup>36</sup> Declaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Laneel-Tanner, *The New International Commentary*, 965.

<sup>37</sup> Thijs Booij, “Psalm CXXXIX: Text, Syntax, Meaning,” *Vetus Testamentum* 55, no. 1 (2005): 1-19, accessed September 26, 2017, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

like a 3D printer puts mass to shapes that then can be touched and experienced on all sides and not just a flat surface.

Derek Kidner, in his commentary in *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* says of verse seventeen that David has moved on from “contemplating his own thoughts and their nakedness before God (v. 2) to considering Gods innumerable thoughts towards him (v. 17-18).”<sup>38</sup> He goes further to emphasize how the body has its own wealth of “unimaginable detail, every point of it from the mind of God” and that “such divine knowledge is not only ‘wonderful’ but precious, since it carries its own proof of infinite commitment: God will not leave the work of His hands.”<sup>39</sup> Verses nineteen through twenty-four seem to be a petition for God to protect him from the evildoers who speak of God maliciously and try to keep him from believing that he is fearfully and wonderfully made. Verses nineteen through twenty-two take on a different perspective of David during this prayer of adoration to God. David asked God to protect him from his enemies, in particular those who are blood-thirsty, speak maliciously and lift themselves up against God for evil. When reading this passage, one has to ask if David is thinking of someone in particular and possible two different types of people, when praying this part of the Psalm. Declasse-Walford, Jacobson and Laneel-Tanner believe that the Psalms sounds like it was written by a Psalm singer who has been hurt.<sup>40</sup> He goes from speaking of what many scholars say is the omniscience and omnipresence of God to asking him to protect him or in the New Revised Standard Version “to kill the wicked” and “that the

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<sup>38</sup> Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Psalms 73-150* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 466.

<sup>39</sup> Kidner, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, 466.

<sup>40</sup> Declasse-Walford, Jacobson, and Laneel-Tanner, *The New International Commentary*, 962.

bloodthirsty would depart from him. These verses do not seem to flow from the previous verses seventeen and eighteen. Kidner says that David went from reverie to disturbing resolve.<sup>41</sup> Verse twenty seems to answer the question if he is talking about more than one type of people; it describes two types of people “those who speak of God maliciously and those who lift themselves up against God for evil.”

The last description ‘those who lift themselves up against God for evil’ sounds comparable to what Paul admonished the believers at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, “for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.” It is possible that David was praying at this point asking God to help him with whatever and whomever was trying to stop him from thinking of himself as a fearfully and wonderfully creation of God. This possibility becomes evident in verses twenty-three and twenty-four when David asks God to search and know his heart and test him and know his thoughts and lead him in the way everlasting. Indeed, believing what God thinks of us and thinking how he wants us to think is a struggle for the believer because it has been addressed a couple times in scripture (Phil. 4:8 and Col. 3:2). Verses nineteen and twenty have also been compared by some theologians to Jeremiah 12:1-3 where the prophet Jeremiah questions why the wicked prosper. The seemingly harse words of these verses is to James Luther Mays illustrates “the wicked and their dangerous part of the reality in the midst of which faith must live.”<sup>42</sup> He goes further to say that “to speak of them in

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<sup>41</sup> Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, 467.

<sup>42</sup> Mays, *Intrepretation*, 428.

speaking of one's relation to God was completely consistent, especially where the relation was to God in his judging discernment of one's life.”<sup>43</sup> The book of Psalm 139 is doing just that and so we cannot dismiss the awesome way in which God uses the presence of the wicked to help us see God's power.

## New Testament

The New Testament scripture is 1 Corinthians 6:19, which states, “or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?” The Book of Corinthians is named for the community of believers in Christ in the Greek city of Corinth. Authorship is credited to the Apostle Paul.<sup>44</sup> It is also postulated that Paul actually wrote the letter himself instead of using a scribe, which was customary during that day. The unusual way in which Paul draws attention to his signature is found in the sixteenth chapter verse twenty-one, where it states, “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand,” is the evidence used for this speculation.<sup>45</sup> Much of the writings of 1 Corinthians revolve around the writings of the Delphic Letter of Claudius, which connects to Lucius Gallio, the elite that Paul baptized, and dates at around April or May AD 52. An earlier date is also a possibility. 1 Corinthians is one of two letters written to the believers at Corinth with 2 Corinthians being the second. However, many scholars have long debated and researched whether or not 1 Corinthians is a composite of 2 Corinthians or more compositions of original

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<sup>43</sup> Mays, *Intrepretation*, 428.

<sup>44</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>45</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

letters.<sup>46</sup> 1 Corinthians is said to be 1 Corinthians because it is the longer of the two letters.<sup>47</sup>

1 Corinthians is a reflection of the life and happenings of the early Christian community in a Greco-Roman city. It addresses the many ethical challenges, struggles in faith and transition faced by converts who are rooted in the Greco-Roman polytheism. Greco polytheism is the belief in or worship of more than one god.<sup>48</sup> Syrians, Egyptians, and Greeks who emigrated from surrounding cities populated this Greco-Roman city during Paul's day. Corinth during this time was a Roman city that was re-founded by Julius Caesar around 44 BCE after its brutal destruction by Mummius in 146 BCE. Corinth was originally populated by freedman and legionary veterans as recorded by the New Oxford Annotated Bible. Corinth became the capital of the province of Achaia and the judicial seat of the Roman proconsul as documented in Acts 18:12. It states "while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment."<sup>49</sup> Corinth is also noted for containing both the rich and poor with a flourishing commercial center.<sup>50</sup>

David DeSilva noted that the city of Corinth was a city of increasing prosperity and obvious patronage. Anthony C. Thiselton in his writings in the *Commentary on the Greek Text* notes that the city of Corinth's prosperity was a result of its distinctive

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<sup>46</sup> Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians: Sacra Pagina Series*, vol. 7 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 12.

<sup>47</sup> Collins, *First Corinthians*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>49</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>50</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

“geographical situation.” He states that it was at the crossroads or intersection between east and west and between north and south. It was situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbors, of which one leads to Asia and the other to Italy. This indeed made it easy for the exchange of merchandise these cities and others.<sup>51</sup> He also states that Corinth was a city of “the practice of performance of Rhetoric, the arts (both musical and instrumental, poetry and drama) in both the Greek and Latin classics and as well as new literary compositions.”<sup>52</sup> Corinth also held the Isthmian Games every two years, which drew large crowds to a rehabilitated theater by Emperor Augustus in the late first century BCE and it held more than fifteen thousand spectators.<sup>53</sup>

As it relates to worship Corinth was considered sacred to the goddess Aphrodite protector of prostitutes and other gods. Her famous sanctuary stood on the Acrocorinth the home of the temple of Asclepius who was the god of healing.<sup>54</sup> DeSilva in his writings on Corinth states that in Corinth there was no distinction between religion and secular life and no separation of church and state.<sup>55</sup> George T. Montague in the Commentary on sacred scripture: First Corinthians states that "Aphrodite presented the most common temptation to the male converts to the new faith."<sup>56</sup> Corinth was

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<sup>51</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 1.

<sup>52</sup> David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 557.

<sup>53</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>54</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>55</sup> DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 555.

<sup>56</sup> George T. Montague, *Commentary on Sacred Scripture: First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 110.

considered the principal center of missionary activity.<sup>57</sup> Anthony Thiselton in the *Commentary on the Greek Text*, states that there may have been a couple of reasons why Paul was drawn to Corinth. He states that Paul was drawn to Corinth because of the large size of its Jewish community, the great size and importance of Corinth itself and the reputation of the Isthmian Games and the crowds it drew.<sup>58</sup> Thiselton also notes that the cities awesome geographical situation, large tourism and the Isthmian Games was a win for Paul's trade and business as a tentmaker. Regardless of the reason, it became the largest and most important of the early churches.

As far as the converts during Paul's era in Corinth, they were mostly lower class, lacking in education, wealth, and birth as stated in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28. Laura Nasrallah in the *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: 1 Corinthians 6:12-7:40* states that "Participants in the ekklēsia at Corinth lived in a city stepped in the history of former slavery."<sup>59</sup> Paul asks the people of Corinthians to look back on when they were first called and that not many of them were wise by human standards, not many were influential; and not many were of noble birth.<sup>60</sup> However, even though many of the converts were not of wealth or nobility he is known to have baptized persons of elite status. In example, Gaius as documented in 1 Corinthians 1:14 and Romans 16:23, who became host to the whole church. It is highlighted by Cliffard that after Paul left Corinth the community of believers would write him asking for advice on several issues such as

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<sup>57</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>58</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 17.

<sup>59</sup> Laura S. Nasrallah, *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: 1 Corinthians 6:12-7:40* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 442.

<sup>60</sup> Cliffard and Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

marriage, food sacrificed to idols, spiritual gifts, and other matters (7:1, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1 and 12).

First Corinthians is identified as an epistle or letter and it was customarily read aloud as a public oral presentation during biblical times. It contains all of what was customary for a letter to contain. It has an opening greeting with what Raymond Collins in his commentary in the *Sacra Pagina* Series states “gives a so-and-so to so-and-so greeting or salutation, and ends with a complementary closing.”<sup>61</sup> Paul’s letter writing in 1 Corinthians is also considered by Collins as characteristic of a Hellenistic letter as well as is considered a form of rhetoric called deliberative rhetoric. Some of what he identifies regarding Paul’s writing in 1 Corinthians gives support to what Coogan expressed in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* and that is that 1 Corinthians has many abrupt transitions, frequent changes of themes and generally loses construction.

Collins identifies 1 Corinthians as that of Hellenistic letter writing because it has a structure typical of Hellenistic writing. The letters typically start with a greeting and end with an unsigned closing. Even though Paul wrote this letter the way in which he wrote his closing is a typical of a Hellenistic letter, however, 1 Corinthians has a signature that Hellenistic letters did not contain. Collins states that Hellenistic letters seek to create presence while the letter is being read when the author is unable to be present.<sup>62</sup> This corresponds with Thiselton’s belief in that Paul attempted to make Christ transparent to

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<sup>61</sup> Collins, *First Corinthians*, 1.

<sup>62</sup> Collins, *First Corinthians*, 3.

Corinth through transformative speech-action. He taught and responded to the believers at Corinth through transparent action, lifestyle, thought and utterance.<sup>63</sup>

Throughout the epistle of 1 Corinthians, Paul notes his absence and used it as a support to his admonishment while writing to the believers at Corinth (5:3). Another way that Collins notes that 1 Corinthians was a typical Hellenistic letter is that it follows the form of a letter of recommendation called Pseudo-Demetrius or “*typos Systatikos*,” which Hellenistic letters typically followed.<sup>64</sup> These letters were written on behalf of those who were carrying correspondence from a letter writer. Paul mentions Stephanas and his companions in 16:15-18, which has been used to make this case.<sup>65</sup> Due to the mention or commendation Stephanas and his companions have been considered the ones who read this letter aloud to the believers at Corinth.<sup>66</sup> This letter is also a response to an ongoing conversation or correspondence from a letter that Paul received (7:11; 16:17-18). Another reason First Corinthians is considered a Hellenistic letter is because it contains several phrases that Collins notes as common in Hellenistic letters called epistolary cliché. Examples include “concerning,” “therefore” (7:11, 4:16 and 10:31). Collins also states that due to the elements of Hellenistic letters and some aspects of a Pseudo-Demetrius type writing, Paul’s letters could be considered Hellenistic, diplomatic, apostolic or ecclesial writing. First Corinthians is seen as a personal or friendship letter written to people that he cared about and had a loving relationship with.

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<sup>63</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 43.

<sup>64</sup> Collins, *First Corinthians*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Collins, *First Corinthians*, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Collins, *First Corinthians*, 4.

With First Corinthians being considered a dialogue it also can be categorized as rhetoric. Based upon the contents or nature of what Paul is saying to the believers and also how he is saying it, the letter is considered deliberative rhetoric. Deliberative rhetoric is concerned with the future and its purpose is to lead the audience to make a decision. It was typically practiced in the political arena. Deliberative rhetoric seeks to persuade or exhort. Chapter one and verse ten provides evidence where Paul states, “now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.”

Chapter six is a portion of the body of the letter, which starts at chapter 1:10 and continues until chapter sixteen when Paul gives his final remarks and instruction, notable mentions, his signature and closing (16:23-24).

Chapter six of First Corinthians is outlined as such:

- I. Pauls’ admonishment regarding lawsuits as a way to handle disputes amongst the believers. (v. 1-8)
- II. Pauls’ explanation of what will cause the believer not to inherit the Kingdom of God. (v. 9-11)
- III. Paul’s explanation of the power given at Conversion to not be dominated or controlled by anything but the Spirit of God that now indwells them. (v. 12-18)
- IV. The body no longer the individuals own but the temple of Spirit bought with a price for God use. (v. 19-20)

Many theological writers also believe that chapter six closely works in connection with chapter seven where Paul addresses specifically what was written to him in a letter. The letter referenced that it was good for a man not to touch a women and other teachings on marriage and the difference in appropriate conduct regarding porneia and the body

(sōma). It is also said that “chapter seven gives the appropriate practices of the individual body and the body politic.”<sup>67</sup> In chapter seven, Paul continues to teach what should happen in the marriage union of the believer, including how a husband should treat his wife and how the wife should treat her husband. The chapter also addresses to the single or unmarried person as it relates to when to get married.

Chapter 6:1-11 is speaking about the believers taking other believers to court in order to resolve their disputes amongst each other. Paul admonishes the believers that they should identify these issues and handle them in accordance with the Holy Spirit instead of taking them to the secular courts and having them judged by unbelievers who are not presiding under the direction of the Spirit of God. Paul understands that the true resolution is a transformation within the inner man. In his admonishment Paul connotes that as believers they should be the ones sought out to preside and judge matters because they are the most capable in handling the matters as Christian believers under the leading and directing of the Holy Spirit. Collins in the *Sacra Pagina Commentary* says that the believers when choosing to seek judgment from unjust judges instead of handling it themselves put at issue the community’s identity as God’s Holy people and as the rightful judges of moral matters. He references First Corinthians 1:2 and states that it also disrupted the boundaries that should exist between the community of believers and nonbelievers.<sup>68</sup> Collins also notes that it is spoken of in Exodus 18:21-22 that Moses’ father-in-law admonished him to find able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain and set them over the people as officers to judge

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<sup>67</sup> Nasrallah, *Fortress Commentary*, 442.

<sup>68</sup> Collins, *First Corinthians*, 227.

for the people at all times. Verses one through six calls attention to this fact and questions why it is happening. Collins states that Paul conducted a rhetorical questioning strategy in order to appeal to the believers' understanding that their way of living should be different and that their nature and character should be transformed into a new nature. Collins states that Paul presents nine rhetorical questions, three of which are included within verses one through six. It is suggested that these questions ultimately were also designed so that Paul could create an eschatological framework for his argument that the believer's lives should be more noble and just than that of the non-believer.

Verses seven through eight are another form of rhetorical questioning arguing a contrast that plays into the notion that Paul created his eschatological framework for his argument.<sup>69</sup> Verses nine through eleven continue this particular way of questioning and arguing to create a rhetorical effect. Verses nine through eleven specifically addressed fornication and sexual immorality or (porneia) and the law of the land, which at that time was regularly involved in activities in temples like the one for the goddess of prostitutes. DeSilva in his text points out that in the day of this writing the city of Corinth was sacred for the worship of the goddess Aphrodite who was the goddess of prostitution. Paul seemed to be writing to directly address the proclivity of the believers to continue to engage as the society did in worshipping this goddess instead of worshipping the God of their salvation and new life. It also further explains how engaging in fornication is becoming one flesh with someone.<sup>70</sup> Paul also teaches how as believers they have

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<sup>69</sup> Collins, *First Corinthians*, 229.

<sup>70</sup> DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*.

become one spirit with God and that the body is now a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit and such acts against the body like fornication can no longer take place.

Green, Fee and Stonehouse when speaking of verses twelve through eighteen in their writings on 1 Corinthians in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* state that Paul is exacting a frontal attack on the convert's (especially men's) theological justification of their belief. By being people of the Spirit believers have been moved to a higher plane and realm of the Spirit where they are unaffected by behavior that has merely to do with the body.<sup>71</sup> This attack is deliberately to help the believers to know the difference that a new life in Christ should bring.

Collins states that the phrase that Paul uses in verse twelve points to the talk about legal matters by using legal cliché or jargon to address the law of the land, however, J. Paul Sampley in his commentary on this text says that Paul's jargon doesn't have anything to do with the law but is a pre-reference to his teaching on what is "permissible," allowable or authorized for a believer which he addresses later in the letter of First Corinthians.<sup>72</sup> These items include his reference to food for the stomach and the body for food presented in chapters eight through eleven. There he encourages the believer not to be concerned with the desires of the flesh and what the body is made for more than they are concerned with the connection that the body and the believer have with the God of their salvation.

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<sup>71</sup> Joel B. Green, Gordon D. Fee, and Ned B. Stonehouse, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 276.

<sup>72</sup> J. Paul Sampley, *The New Testament Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes. Acts, Intro to Epistolary Literature, Romans and I Corinthian* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), 855.

In a very creative way of teaching, Paul helps the believers at Corinth to understand their new way of freedom and life by talking about something that they are familiar with prostitution, slavery and the joining of bodies together. Prostitution is a sexually immoral act that was very heavily taking place during that day. Paul used this knowledge of the act to further explain how the believer's conversion has created a connection to the Spirit of God and has given them a new identity and a new owner and connection (v. 15-18). Paul references Mark 10:8 where Mark explains that, "two shall become one flesh." Paul further teaches to express his point in verse eighteen stating that once converted the Lord took up residence in the bodies of humanity and now through the sacrifice made by Jesus, they were purchased for God's use and are temples of the Holy Spirit and no longer their own and do not and cannot conduct themselves without care as the way of the day presents. Scholar Laura Nasrallah says that Paul wanted them to know that they cannot and do not have to be slaves to the human way of living any longer.<sup>73</sup>

The focal verse for this thesis project preliminarily spoken of above, seems to be an expressive point in Paul's teaching that serves to help the believer understand and own the fact that they are valued temples for the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Further, as believers with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they must value the use of their bodies. Verse nineteen states "or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?" The Greek translation for the word "body" is "Sōma"<sup>74</sup> which Laura Nasarallah states means

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<sup>73</sup> Nasrallah, *Fortress Commentary*, 442.

<sup>74</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1978), 151.

“signaling the body proper and the body politic (community of believers) and is also used for the term “slave.”<sup>75</sup> Scholars debate if Paul was speaking to the body as meaning the individual and or as the community or body of believers. Nasrallah believes that he was speaking to both because the life and actions of the individual directly affects the life of the whole or community. The *Unger Bible Dictionary* states in its definition of the term “body” or “*Sōma*” that the mystical body is formed by the baptizing work of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), whose operation not only unites Christians to one another but to Christ (Ro. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3: 27).<sup>76</sup> Nasarallah seconds Unger’s belief by saying “Corinthians bodies become members of and come to constitute the body of Christ (6:15) and should communally maintain the purity of their body.”<sup>77</sup>

Many scholars believe that this passage directly addresses the new believer’s misinterpretation of 6:12 “All things are lawful for me” and in verse thirteen “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” Scholars believe that Paul did not want to address the “*porneia*” or sexual immorality as he did want to help the new Corinthian believers really understand their new life in Christ. Green, Fee and Stonehouse believe that the people thought that going to prostitutes did not matter because everything is permissible because the body did not matter in light of God destroying it anyway.<sup>78</sup> They went further to state that in this passage and book Paul seeks to “attack false theology in three parts. One, against their

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<sup>75</sup> Nasrallah, *Fortress Commentary*, 442.

<sup>76</sup> Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 151.

<sup>77</sup> Nasrallah, *Fortress Commentary*, 442.

<sup>78</sup> Green, Fee, and Stonehouse, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 276.

distortion of Christian freedom and two arguing against their misunderstanding of the nature of the body.”<sup>79</sup> They believe Paul builds upon the theological base in verses eighteen, nineteen and twenty against prostitution, for marriage and becoming one flesh as well as that Christian conversion entails one joining to the Lord and becoming one with him and these being the creation of two unions that are mutually exclusive.

Montague in his writings speaks of the attack Paul stages on the believer’s theological distortion and misunderstanding that it “Flies in the face of the platonic notion of the body as a cage from which the soul is freed at death.”<sup>80</sup> The body and the view of it and its care is important for the believer.

Paul’s use of the word body or “*sōma*” was creative and deliberate because in that day the people of Corinth were familiar with slavery and all of the liberties that slave masters took with the body of their female slaves. They were also familiar with the ancient practice that took place in a temple of the gods in order to free a slave from their master. Scholars say that Paul knew that “*sōma*” would resonate with the people of Corinth on multiple levels both the slave body and the communal body.<sup>81</sup> In the situation with slaves they do not have control over their own bodies and are subject to their master’s *porneia* as a normal practice, which in many instances turns into prostitution and one becoming at the whelm of someone and multiple others and there control.<sup>82</sup> Paul speaks in the previous verses that the body is not made for fornication but for the Lord.

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<sup>79</sup> Green, Fee, and Stonehouse, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 276-277.

<sup>80</sup> Montague, *Commentary on Sacred Scripture*, 109.

<sup>81</sup> Nasrallah, *Fortress Commentary*, 442.

<sup>82</sup> Nasrallah, *Fortress Commentary*, 442.

As believers, they have been joined with the Lord and joined with his body through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and thus have become one with him for God's purpose. God's purpose for the body is for sanctity for the use as a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit where the activities of prostitution do not defile the temple. This action of porneia not only means the indwelling of un-Godly spirits but the drive and leading of passions and emotions, which leads in the direction of actions not interested in pleasing God or caring for humankind. Instead, the action is for its own pleasure and use. These actions of joining together for purposes other than God's use do not mix. Craig S. Keenen in the *New Cambridge Bible Commentary* states that Paul "emphasizes the body's sanctity with an argument that climaxes in the exhortation to "glorify God in your body in 6:20."<sup>83</sup>

Vang in his writings states that Paul is not labeling sex as negative but he used it here to highlight that the body cannot be separated from a person's relationship to God, body and Spirit because body and Spirit are not separable. What happens in the body impacts the spirit and vice versa.<sup>84</sup> He goes further to say that sexual immorality makes the body unholy and thereby unfit as the temple for God's Spirit as presented as support between seventeen and eighteen.<sup>85</sup>

Not only did Paul use the word "body/slave" "sōma" to teach his point he also used the word "temple." The word for temple in the Greek is "naos," which is the place of the deity's presence.<sup>86</sup> The word "naos" is also referenced in 1 Thessalonians 2:4.

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<sup>83</sup> Craig S. Keenen, *The New Cambridge Bible Commentary: 1-2 Corinthians* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 56.

<sup>84</sup> Vang, *Teach the Text Commentary*, 87.

<sup>85</sup> Vang, *Teach the Text Commentary*, 87.

<sup>86</sup> Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 1179

Evans and Porter express that the word is used to metaphorically “depict a human habitation for the Holy Spirit, usually meaning Christ’s Body, the church; however in 16:9 it is describing the individual believer’s body.”<sup>87</sup> Paul appealed the decision that the believer is made to live for and cherish the Christ to whom they confessed and were converted. Paul used truth as an attention grabber to provide a greater understanding. Paul was also trying to exemplify the importance for believers to no longer engage in societal processes by explaining what it really meant to be worldly and of the world.

In verse nineteen Paul is letting the believers know that they have a new identity as believers of Jesus Christ, they are the temples of the Holy Spirit. The temple was a place that everyone was familiar with for there were no shortages of temples in this day; both temples erected and sanctified for God and for other gods. However, in these verses Paul teaches the difference between temples of the day and the Believer as a temple of the Holy Spirit. In verses nineteen (b) and twenty, Paul explains that the believer at conversion becomes the property of the Lord and thus is not their own and because of this new possession they cannot and should not engage in anything that joins them to anything other than the Spirit of God or prohibits the care of the body as a temple set apart for the living God. In verse twenty he states, “For you were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body.” Collins notes throughout his commentary, that Paul used words and phrases consistent with rhetorical effects to appeal to the believers at Corinth. Further, the Corinthians had already been given a compelling argument persuading them to allow the Holy Spirit to align their lives accordingly. When Paul speaks of ‘for your body is bought with a price’ (1 Cor. 6:20), he was referencing the fact

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<sup>87</sup> Evans and Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 1179.

that Jesus became the propitiation for the atonement of our sins and thus with his life he bought our lives to become owner, Lord, and King and not just over only our lives, but that of the worlds; setting us free from sin and shame as expressed in 1 Jn. 2:2.

### *Conclusion*

Psalm 139:14 is an expression of worship and prayer by David, a Psalmist expressing God's power, thoughtfulness, omniscience, and omnipresence that is worthy of adoration, care and a lifetime of honoring God. "I praise you, for I am fearfully, wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well." The Psalmist recognizes that from the very beginning while he was in his mother's womb God knitted him together, muscle by muscle, tendon by tendon and bone to bone and that God knew and determined what he would become. The Psalmist realized how much care God took to orchestrate his own existence with knowledge of what his life would entail and he blesses God for this truth and recognition. He blesses God because God knows his thoughts, and his intentions, because God created him purposefully and strategically for God's purpose. God distinguished him and set him apart for a specific purpose. God has known him, where he has been, where he is and where he is going because he had it all in mind when he created him. The ability of the Psalmist to worship God for this fact serves as an example to believers to be able to worship God the same for God has made all of us with this same care. God in his omniscience has created the believer purposefully for a carefully constructed reason and use. This Psalm also helps the believer understand that God will be with us no matter where he has purposed us to go as well as the places that

we choose to go because again in God's omniscience God knew the places and spaces that we would traffic because God formed and knitted us together and knows us.

1 Corinthians 6:19 is a very creative approach or attack as scholars have called it by Paul on the new believers distorted theological interpretation of the purpose and use of the body. The people of Corinth thought that because God would destroy the body that it did not matter if they continued to live their lives as they had before conversions and engaging in the normal activities of the day that included engaging in the temple activities of the day that included sexual immorality. Paul also attacked the new believers understanding of their new life in Christ as a result of his sacrifice on the cross. As new believers Christ has joined with them spiritually and raised them from their old way of living to a new life in God where God has placed the Holy Spirit as a indwelling presence for sanctity and use it in a way that does not defile the body and continues in the freedom of which Christ has set them free to live. Paul uses familiar terminology of the day to help him plan what God has done in their life and existence. He uses body "*sōma*" both to reference them as individual and also as the body of Christ Communal in explaining that what is done in the body effects the body individually because the body or person is subject to Gods judgement and also the body communal because what one does effects the whole. Paul uses the term slave "*sōma*" which is the Greek word for body as well to give the correlation to the sexual immorality of the day and how it plays out in the life of a slave when she is misused by her slave master. The slave master controls her against her will for solely his purposes of *porneia* "sexual impulses," which the body is not made for especially as a new believer. The body of the believer is for the Lord and not fornication. Paul went further to us another familiar term "temple" "*naos*" to help the

new believer to understand the awesome difference between the temples of the day and the activities that occurred in them and the believer as a temple for the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit both individually and collectively. The individual was a temple for the use by God and Gods holy and sanctified are set apart for purpose. The collective body as people are worthy to do such righteous things as judge over the matters of man, to be lead and guided by God to do holy and righteous things that draw more men, woman and children to God.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Sex and sexuality is not something that just became a subject of discussion during the sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies. The church had a view on the role of sex and sexuality in the life of the Christian in the church and in society for centuries. This view has changed over the years and that change in understanding of its role in the life of the believer and its spiritual significance as intended by God has been debated. Even though this view has changed over the years it has made a very strong impression upon how men and woman view themselves and others. It has also addressed the issue of purity, devotedness to God, chastity, and the issue of the significance that sex and sexuality has meant to the life of the believer.

The teachings of the church fathers and their views have assisted in the shaping of Christian thought on the sexes. Their thoughts and interpretations on communion with God and the scriptures along with that of prominent theologians down through the centuries have served to prescribe how the female is viewed and treated. As a result, women have been given a limited place in the church and society based upon these views and teachings. Throughout the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries many writings and clarifications in thoughts from such male theologians as Augustine, Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome as well as other theological scholars and followers of Christ have pondered, written, debated, taught and defined what God has meant by sex

and sexuality and devotion to God.<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this foundation chapter we will look at how this discussion about the human body and the view on the different sexes both male and female can be traced to the early church fathers or monastic fathers. This discussion will seek to give an understanding of the negative and limited view of women has shaped not only how the church views woman but also how woman view themselves.

Joyce E. Salisbury in *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* gives an outstanding look at the view of the early church fathers and theological teachers regarding sex and the female body and how it has shaped the view of and interaction of the church with the virgin women.<sup>2</sup> In her book she highlights how the early church father's views led the way for the first interpretations and views on the holiness and un-holiness of the female body. It has also helped to shape the interpretation of how the female both married and unmarried, in ministry and outside of ministry is accepted or rejected and how she should conduct herself.<sup>3</sup> The writings of Salisbury provide greater insight as to the sentiments of the early church fathers as it relates to the female body and the taboo nature associated with sex in the church.

This historical reflection seeks to pull out some of the prominent Christian teachings that have shaped what sex education has consisted of throughout the history of the church and how that teaching gives reason and a need for a new dialogue and teaching on the sexes and their inclusion in the church. The teachings of the early church fathers are the basis from which other prominent teachings on church governance and

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<sup>1</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Joyce E. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (New York, NY: Verso Publishing, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

Christian morality has its origin and is an excellent place to look to find a pattern of thought on the role of women in the Christian church.

During the fifth, sixth, and earlier centuries we find the strong origin in the need for strong devotion to God in the form of monastic or ascetic living. This type of living played out in seclusion in deserts and eventually to secure monastery campuses and living habitations. In this monastic and ascetic living was found individuals who were considered renouncers or *Apotaktikoi*. These were individuals renounced careers, status, property, marriage, and family in order to be devoted solely to God and in its most worthy way.<sup>4</sup> The first individuals who have been revered as notable persons to have lived the most devoted are the desert fathers. Their inspirational living has since been the example of many who have followed in their footsteps of simple and devoted living unto the Lord.

The life of renunciation involved the surrendering of one's total self to God including, mind, body and spirit, all lusts, passions, and anything that might work against complete devotion and connection to God. This in often cases was also family, friends and connection to people. One of the main aspects of self that was worked on very diligently was sexual desire and lust. This was an aspect of devoted living that needed constant work and surrendering. William Harmless in his book *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* says they felt that "sexual desire was frequently overshadowed as a source of spiritual danger by the dull aches of pride and resentment and by dread on slaughts of immoderate spiritual ambition."<sup>5</sup> As a result of

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<sup>4</sup> William S. J. Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 232.

<sup>5</sup> Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 234.

this total devotion to God in monastic or ascetic living Harmless also points out that “there were troubling sexual stereotypes and often unyielding stress on repression and an unwillingness to confirm the goodness and dignity of sexuality.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Salisbury, the early church fathers considered men to be primarily spiritual and women carnal. Men were also considered holy when they exhibited the male characteristics of spirituality and power in their purest forms.<sup>7</sup> Joyce also reports that since women were considered carnal, they had to renounce the things that defined them as women in order to achieve spirituality. For the man, it was renouncement of flesh and lust, however for woman it took on the renouncement of the all of the above but also self because in her womanly state and carnality she was not pleasing to God. The early church fathers held a dualistic view on sexuality. They held a clear distinction between what was carnal or sexual and what was not spiritual, in an effect to help men and women pursue the ascetic life.

Carnality and spirituality were very concrete states of being to the fathers; you were either led by the spirit or by the flesh in accordance to their interpretation of the Bible. One of the early church fathers and desert monks who wrote *Life of Paul the Hermit*,<sup>8</sup> Jerome believed that the body could be either a temple of God through which miracles come or it could be a brothel in which the “members of Christ” had been prostituted.<sup>9</sup> This view as highlighted by Joyce Salisbury also comes from the view of the

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<sup>6</sup> Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 232.

<sup>7</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

<sup>8</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishing, 2010), 169.

<sup>9</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

early church fathers that the fall of man was sexual. They believed that the fall brought about the parameters of marriage that bound two bodies together where each no longer had control over one's own body. Each then became indebted to each other's carnal or sexual desires and the fulfillment of them. The fall of man was believed to be what brought about the need for any talk about flesh and sex. They believed that before the fall and after the end of the age, sex will not be a factor for the believer and that sex will not be a need in heaven and thus chastity rather than sex is the preferred state. As Salisbury noted in her book for the early fathers, "the carnal and the spiritual realms were opposites, and as such were mutually exclusive and thus activities that pertained to one realm precluded participation in activities in other realms."<sup>10</sup>

According to Salisbury the early fathers believed that a couple of things lured people to the flesh realm very easily and should be avoided, in example the sense of touch, sight, smell, and oral sensations. Jerome believed the touch between a man and a women and the sense of smell, which was anything provocative and that leads to the belly or the physical and oral sensations was igniting to the flesh and needed to be avoided.<sup>11</sup> Tertullian is noted as being concerned about the sense of sight; he believed that the sense of sight was a pathway to lust and thus urged that virgin women veil their faces because a glance from them could incite someone to lust after them.<sup>12</sup> Men were seen as a particular risk to the glance from the woman because it was said that a glance from a women would foster concupiscence and enkindle the fire of hope but was fuel for a fantasy that would

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<sup>10</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*, 14-15.

<sup>11</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

<sup>12</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

stir sexual desire.<sup>13</sup> Smell was also a portal into the sinful, lustful world. Ambrose, bishop and theologian of the western church believed that engaging in the carnal world brought about physical, sensual consequences and mainly that of the odor of death.<sup>14</sup> This odor of death was what Ambrose believed existed in the realm of the flesh. He believed that those who existed in the spiritual realm held the odor of life. Sex for the early church fathers was the center of the flesh and all things physical led to sexuality and led away from devotion to God.<sup>15</sup>

Even though the early fathers believed that man should stay chaste in order to be spiritual they also believed that the urges, desires and passions of the body were God given in order for procreation and that in order to overcome these desires one must act against nature. Once interacting in the nature of passions results in the strong desire to continue because it is also very pleasurable. The early church fathers also believed just as Paul did that to remain unmarried was the desired state, it kept men from all of the distractions that married life produced in seeking devotion to God.

The early church fathers really believed that they were writing their teachings from the spiritual realm and thus looking from the outside in. From this vantage point comes all that was stated above as it relates to the human body and also about sex. Along with their beliefs as highlighted above they also believed that sex is disgusting and degrading.<sup>16</sup> This is a bizarre notion since they are highlighted as believing that sexual passion and desire was given by God for procreation. Salisbury states that for the fathers

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<sup>13</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

<sup>14</sup> Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*.

<sup>15</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

<sup>16</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

this view also mirrored or paralleled the spiritual and the carnal; anything that was not of the spiritual and did not promote spirituality was carnal. Sex was not of the spiritual realm and was considered carnal, therefore all carnal things had to be depleted. With sex being considered carnal it was a clear indication that if sexual, one was not operating in the spiritual.

This view of sex as disgusting and degrading also helped the drawing of the lines of difference between the sexes (male and female) for the church fathers as well.<sup>17</sup> This created what Salisbury notes is a “patristic characteristic of sex in general.”<sup>18</sup> These patristic characteristics of sexuality applied to both men and women and, created the differences for ascetic living for male and female, making living an ascetic life very different for each of the genders. It also defined life for the Christian women and her ministry through the centuries much different

The early church fathers view of men and woman parallel their view of the spiritual and the carnal realms with the man placed as the spiritual and the women as the carnal. The early fathers taught that man holds the natural place of order of being over the women just as the spirit is supposed to govern the flesh. Salisbury quotes Isidore Seville where he said that women are under the power of man because they are spiritually fickle and in need to be governed by man. The woman is primarily painted as the weaker, subtle, passive and nurturing sex which made her open to receive the rule of the man and allow him to dominate over her, while the man is the stronger, and active sex and the one who should rule and dominate in all areas. Characteristics also based on a patristic view

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<sup>17</sup> Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*.

<sup>18</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*, 21.

with man as the head or lead, however, very susceptible to subtlety of the woman. Salisbury also notes that the fathers took on the Roman Empires view that the male should be the active partner. Women were considered carnal and sexual by nature whereas men even though characterized as the active partner, sexuality was not central to his manliness. Women made temptation hard for men to resist for it was said “spiritual men in the presence of carnal women would be tempted to be drawn into the physical realm, with the metaphor of the spirit trapped in the flesh made real by the spiritual man’s penetration into the women’s body.”<sup>19</sup>

The early fathers taught that men were being led away and seduced by the evil woman with her carnal behavior of sexual illicitness. Further, the early fathers promoted that men could not resist the temptation of the women. Joyce Salisbury states that Tertullian believed that “Women are the devil’s door: and that through them Satan creeps into men’s hearts and minds and works his wiles for their spiritual destruction.”<sup>20</sup> Lisa Cahill in her writings on gender in theology says Tertullian said that “women are the devil’s gateway because she was the unsealer of the forbidden tree, first deserter of the divine law, the persuader of the one who was not valiant enough to attack man and destroyed Gods image, man.”<sup>21</sup> Tertullian had really harsh words to say about women which he shared with those who would listen.

Everything that the fathers believed that was evil came by the body of the women. Lust was characterized as being manifested through the women’s body. These views of

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<sup>19</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*, 22-23.

<sup>20</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*, 23.

<sup>21</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Gender in Theology, Spirituality and Practice* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2012), 13.

the fathers caused a fear of the female gender; a woman had the power to distract, lure, and trap men in a world of sin, evilness, and not able to operate or benefit from the spiritual realm controlled by the spirit, thus not in communion with God. Women had been painted as being removed from any possibility of reconciliation with the spirit realm whereas men were given that possibility and the ability to be reconciled even if they fell into the temptresses lure. Women were defined as evil, temptresses whether they wanted to be or not. In these teachings and stigma, she was made to feel ashamed and was unable to live an ascetic life where she could attain true communion with God without first doing away with her evil feminine self. Tertullian is noted for labeling women as “the devil’s gateway” and for suggesting that “woman wear mourning clothes all the time as penance for the original sin because they were the reason for the cause of the fall.”<sup>22</sup>

Lastly, Salisbury notes that the early church fathers’ view also lead them to teach that everything about a woman should be treated suspicious. Everything about her was characterized as a threat; her hair, her menstrual flow, her body, her voice, her touch. In this it is easy to see why a woman could be taught to hate herself, and not value the unique and wonderfulness of her body down through the centuries. Women could not think about celebrating her uniqueness as a woman capable of replenishing the earth, because she was told that she could not serve the Lord and experience his love and power without doing away with her femininity. This is due in part to the fact that the early church fathers held that “since by nature women were lustful temptresses who were open to sexuality, they could not act as women if they were to be spiritual. They had to

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<sup>22</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*, 23.

transcend their gender, which was by definition sexual and reproductive.”<sup>23</sup> One such example was that of Perpetua a Roman Matron who was killed for sport in Carthage in 317. It was recorded that she believed that she was step by step renouncing everything that made her a woman and a matron in pursuit of being devoted to God as if this state of devotion could only be achieved in this way.<sup>24</sup> Her last vision was that of two comely young men whom she considered her helpers coming to her and aiding her in stripping away everything about her until she became a man and transcended both this life and everything that made her unpleasing to be with God.<sup>25</sup> It is interesting why she felt as though she could not achieve a pleasing state with God without being stripped and becoming a man. In another example, Laura Swan in her book, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers Sayings, Lives and Stories of Early Christian Women*,<sup>26</sup> smooth over the women’s stance in ascetics by describing it by saying, “to be manly was not necessarily being a male but was to live beyond the passions; being aware of them but not letting them rule.”<sup>27</sup> She goes further to state that several dessert mothers or Ammas considered it is a compliment when they were referred to as the “female man of God” because some did not see it as doing away with femininity but doing away with any and everything that separated them from true communion and devotion to God.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Miller Cox, *Women in Early Christianity Translations from Greek Text* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Cox, *Women in Early Christianity*, 105.

<sup>26</sup> Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mother’s Sayings, Lives and Stories of Early Christian Women* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2001), 39.

<sup>27</sup> Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mother’s*, 39.

One of the early church fathers Jerome is quoted by Salisbury as believing that “as long as woman is for birth and children, she is different from men as body is from soul.”<sup>28</sup> But if she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called man. Annemarie S. Kidder in her book “Women, Celibacy and the church” paints Jerome as one who believed in the preservation of virginity. He wrote books on how women should govern themselves as they seek to live the virgin life and celibacy. One such teaching of his was that “virgins are to guard against covetousness. While they have surrendered their property by monastic vows, they need to surrender their thoughts of their own comforts as well.”<sup>29</sup> Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg in *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society* states “In view of the churchmen, there was only one way in which women could transcend their unfortunate sexuality and free themselves from their corporeal shackles and this was through a life of virginity of sexless perfection.”<sup>30</sup> She went further to note that “the status of the virgo intacta was nearly a prerequisite for sainthood.”<sup>31</sup>

The early church fathers set the original tone for how women should be viewed and that tone shaped the view of women that lasted for centuries and can still be traced to thoughts viewed in the church today. Women are still considered the weaker sex, men are celebrated or not treated as harshly as women when fornication takes place and a woman is found pregnant. Women are taught to be chaste while men are lucky to be taught about

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<sup>28</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*, 26.

<sup>29</sup> Annemarie S. Kidder, *Women, Celibacy and the Church* (New York, NY: The Cross Roads Publishing Company, 2003), 139.

<sup>30</sup> Jane Schulenburg-Tibbetts, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society Ca. 500-1100* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 127.

<sup>31</sup> Jane Schulenburg-Tibbetts, *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 127.

puberty and what takes place during that phase of growth in a boy's body. Even though this has shaped early teachings of the church there have been other theologians who have challenged and debated this pervasive view of the sexes.

One of these theologians is Augustine of Hippo. Augustine wrote several tracts on his views on sex, sexuality, marriage, adultery, and concupiscence. Augustine's view is based on his belief that "sexuality was not an imperfection or an accident brought into being by Adam and Eve's sin, but a part of God's plan."<sup>32</sup> Salisbury notes that Augustine did not see "sexuality as a primarily female quality or a part of woman's mysterious earthiness, but he believed that sexuality was demonstrated and defined by an erection, which was the mark of male lust."<sup>33</sup> Augustine put the responsibility for sexuality and commitment to God on both sexes instead of just one and he reduced the shame put on women's gender and role in this relational connection, however, Salisbury does not believe that Augustine's view freed up the shame placed on women. She says Augustine started his quest to understand sexuality in the Christian life by looking at it against the lens of the Manichaeism dualism that he was rejecting. Manichaeism is a religion founded by the Persian Mani in the latter half of the third century.<sup>34</sup> It is said to be a fusion of all the religious systems of Zoroastrian Dualism, Babylonian Folklore, Buddhist ethics, and some small and superficial, additions of Christian elements.<sup>35</sup> Augustine did however, start the quest of his understanding by looking at women who practiced the

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<sup>32</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*, 38.

<sup>33</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*, 43.

<sup>34</sup> John Arendzen, "Marcionites," The New Advent, accessed December 13, 2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09591a.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*.

monastic ascetic life and lived the chaste life in both the desert and in communities in urban areas like Rome. He wrote of his observations on sexuality in his early tract “The Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life” which was written in 388.<sup>36</sup> Salisbury notes Augustine as observing that although the women seemed to live like the Manicheans in their rejection of sexuality and in their fasts, they were very different because they did not reject their flesh, they were including all their sternness of faith under Christian Charity.<sup>37</sup> By the women refusing to abstain from sexuality instead of physical renunciation that characterized the ascetics that the early church fathers practiced, Augustine believed that the women showed a different ascetic practice where God was honored in the body through love where it was not made evil or disgusting and was not degraded.

These beliefs along with his study helped Augustine shape the thought that, “The genital organs and sexuality were God-given, and therefore positive.”<sup>38</sup> Augustine was also noted as presenting that it is God’s plan and good for the Christian life. Augustine later wrote a *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean* in 400 in which he gave his defense that, “Marriage is Good.”

Augustine helped to further shape more inclusive thoughts about the female and sexuality by teaching that God provided goods to satisfy people’s natural needs, such as goods of food, drink, sleep, and friendship to be satisfied by marriage and sexual intercourse. Salisbury states that he moved marriage and sexual intercourse into the same category as the benefit as learning.<sup>39</sup> Augustine’s tracts are labeled by Joyce Salisbury as

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<sup>36</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

<sup>37</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

<sup>38</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*, 40.

<sup>39</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

his attempts to change the Christian understanding of sexuality because he realized that there was an anti-sexual context in existence in the Christian thought and teaching on sexuality.

Augustine's view and teachings on the original sin and fall from the Garden of Eden also refuted the early father's thoughts. Augustine believed that the reason for the original fall was disobedience and not sex. Salisbury quotes Augustine as saying that "the evil will precede the evil act."<sup>40</sup> Augustine taught that "by their evil will Adam and Eve presumed to disobey God's will and by this presumption they fell into the sin of pride and that it was this pride that led them away to have intercourse before God had given them permission.<sup>41</sup> Augustine's main focus on the reason for the fall was disobedience, which developed from pride instead of sin. Augustine believed that sex was a consequence of the fall. As a part of the consequence of the fall man and woman no longer have control over their sex organs, "women are to bare children in pain instead of the womb opening itself up and releasing the newborn painlessly, and for men their sexual organ is at its own will to act upon its own impulses."<sup>42</sup>

For Augustine, the fall introduced the disobedience of the flesh to disobedient humanity, and this to him was lust. Unlike the early fathers Augustine believed that lust came to be at the fall and that is what should be guarded against in the life of the believer. He saw lust as a disease and wound that originated at the fall of man transmitted through the disobedience of man and can only be healed when man is reborn through salvation.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*, 42.

<sup>41</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

<sup>42</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*, 42-43.

<sup>43</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

Unlike the early fathers pointing of fingers at women, Augustine believed that man's sexual organ was the house of sinful lust and due to an incident when he was younger that was a strong belief. This lust could be enacted apart from sexual intercourse for procreation as it was intended to him and be solely controlled by the minds passionate thoughts and away from reason and control leading to what he considered sex used wrongly. The taking over of complete control was dangerous because it had the power to cause people to misuse God's gift of sexuality. With the operation in lust one would not need a female partner in marriage, but could use one of the members of the female's body which was not intended for sexual purposes to engage in the fulfillment of sex, which would lead to many out of control disobedient acts. In viewing Augustine's perspective from the twenty-first century, his beliefs are obvious in that there is a fine line between shame and expression of the need for proper management of sexuality.

Peter Brown in *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, says that Augustine "both defended marriage and found a place for virginity within the church."<sup>44</sup> Unlike the early church fathers and subsequent theologian's edicts Augustine is an awesome help in the importance of changing the narrative by which males and females define themselves and how God has defined them as his creation. The female body as well as that of the male are awesome creations made in the image and likeness of God. Females have a responsibility to manage their bodies just as men have a responsibility to manage their bodies even in the presence of females.

Much work has been done throughout the ages in order to give women place among leadership in the churches and in society and prohibit women from gaining

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), 402.

leadership in churches and society. The patriarchal theology that has been passed down through the ages called for such.<sup>45</sup> The views of women as subordinate, weaker, and less capable than men has defined them and as a result women have been left out of meaningful roles within the church. One such teaching is that of John Chrysostom and his Discourse on Genesis 3:16, “Your inclination shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.”<sup>46</sup> John taught that God evoked the equal authority and honor given to women because she did not use her authority well. He taught in this discourse that she consigned herself to a state of subordination, saying, “you have not bourne your liberty, so accept servitude”<sup>47</sup>

The Didascalia Apostolorium was created in support of John Chrysostom’s teaching on women stating, “It is neither right nor necessary therefore that women should be teachers and especially concerning the name of Christ and the redemption of his passion. Praying and entreating the Lord was preferred and no leadership at least not among men.”<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson in *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theology Discourse* says of Aquinas’ teaching that he believed that “Women should not preach since priesthood signifies the eminence of Christ and Women do not signify what pertains to eminence, women should not preach because it is a exercise of wisdom and authority of which they are not capable.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> James M. Child and James W. Forell, *Christian Social Teachings: A Reader in Christian Social Ethics from the Bible to the Present* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> Cox, *Women in Early Christianity*, 30-31.

<sup>47</sup> Cox, *Women in Early Christianity*, 30-31.

<sup>48</sup> Cox, *Women in Early Christianity*, 31.

<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theology Discourse* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002).

As society has sought revolution from primitive ways of viewing the sexes and as society seeks to change the definition of the female gender, the church has had to evaluate the definition of the female gender and her role in the Christian church. In *Sex for Christians*, by Lewis B. Smedes he says it best, “They feel they have a right to enjoy their sexuality, but they don’t know how it fits into their Christian life; and they resent the church’s inability to help them celebrate their sexuality while respecting its limits and liberties.”<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth Johnson believes that sexism has been pervasive throughout the existence of the church in that it is attitudes, value systems, and social patterns which express or support that persons are superior or inferior to one another based on their sex.<sup>51</sup> She helps us to see that the view of the early Monastic fathers has perpetuated that the male sex are superior to the female sex by nature of the order of things and has acted in discriminatory ways to enforce this order.<sup>52</sup> This she also believes is patriarchy and androcentrism which had debilitating effect on women both socially and psychologically, which resulted in the creation of a violent and dehumanizing world of women.<sup>53</sup> For her patriarchy is a form of social organization in which power is always in the hand of the dominate male or men for which androcentrism is a set of personal patterns of thinking and acting that takes the characteristics of the ruling men to be normative for all humanity alienating the female and non-ruling males as deficient, auxiliary other.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Lewis B. Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 6.

<sup>51</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, 23.

<sup>52</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, 23.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, 22.

<sup>54</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, 23-25.

Over the last couple of centuries more than ever there has been a need expressed by faith communities to address how the Christian should celebrate who they are in totality yet teach them how to manage and govern their lives in a way that is pleasing to God. In these more recent centuries the church in some respects has also seen the need for allowing women to serve in more leadership roles within the church leadership.

Women are being consecrated in roles such as bishop and pastor and allowed to be more than just evangelists. Adolphus Chineder Amodi Azuosa in *Gender and Ministry in Early Christianity and the Church Today* highlights that whereas the Catholic Church still does not accept women in leadership roles the Anglican Church opens the doors of authority widely based upon their interpretation of the Holy scriptures.<sup>55</sup> The church is also creating more safe space for the education on sexuality and living the moralistic Christian life. They realize that they cannot keep their rigid ways of thinking or addressing the Christian moral codes. Harold Minor, Joseph Muyskins and Margaret Alexander in their book *Sex Education: The Schools and the Churches* states, “The church has had a negativistic attitude toward sex and from that has come a refusal to speak of sexual matters except by way of euphemism and moralism.”<sup>56</sup> They go further to state that, “A conspiracy of silence has ruled for many years.”<sup>57</sup> Due to the conspiracy of silence many churches have worked to develop revised statements on the importance of sex education.

The Presbyterian Church United States:

Our their 77<sup>th</sup> Assembly in 1937 is quoting as stating “our ministers, laymen, and women...aid educators and parents in providing sound sex instruction” and then

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<sup>55</sup> Adolphus Chineder Amodi Azuoga, *Gender in Ministry in Early Christianity and the Church Today* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 2007), 114.

<sup>56</sup> Harold W. Minor, Joseph B. Muyskins, and Margaret Newell Alexander, *Sex Education: The Schools and the Churches* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1971), 11.

<sup>57</sup> Minor, Muyskins, and Alexander, *Sex Education*, 11.

at their 1962 General Assembly stated that “sex is good” and as “spiritual as well as physical, and given by a gracious and loving God to men and women for the welfare and happiness of the individual as well as for mankind as a whole.”<sup>58</sup>

The United Presbyterian Church in the USA at their General Assembly of 1970 published and ordered a special task force writing on sexuality and the human community. They also reported that, “Human sexuality is seen as an instrument of God’s reconciling activity. It has more than procreative significance and is a vehicle of spirit and a means of communication.” At this General Assembly, they expressed that they felt it is important in the Christian formation of children that they are equipped with realistic understanding and appreciation of their own and others sexuality.<sup>59</sup>

The United Church of Christ in 1970 made the statement, “They believe and teach that sex is not something to be ashamed of, whispered about or treated as wicked and evil, but that on the contrary, sex is one of the two basic instinctive drives or desires that God has given us for the preservation of the species.”<sup>60</sup> As a result of this statement on sex they published a curriculum for seventh and eighth grade students called *Claimed by God* and for eleventh and twelfth grade students a curriculum called *Christian Marriage*.<sup>61</sup>

In 1988 the American Baptist Church called for their congregations to

1. Challenge members to live in a way that models responsible sexuality in accordance with biblical teaching.
2. Expend efforts and funds for teaching responsible sexuality.
3. Provide opportunities for intergenerational dialogue on

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<sup>58</sup> Minor, Muyskins, and Alexander, *Sex Education*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Minor, Muyskins, and Alexander, *Sex Education*.

<sup>60</sup> Minor, Muyskins, and Alexander, *Sex Education*, 16.

<sup>61</sup> Minor, Muyskins, and Alexander, *Sex Education*.

responsible sexuality and Christian life. 3. Provide relevant ministries to adolescents and parents of adolescents in and outside the church.<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion

The views and teachings of the church have been primarily negativistic and clouded with what Augustine and Laeuchli called an anti-sexual stance on sexuality. How can God call something good then man turns around and calls it evil? This view of the sexes brought about by the early church fathers as a result of their ascetics practiced through dualistic views of spirit and carnal and how it plays out in the fall of man through the original sin has caused women to be viewed as inferior, undeserving, and unable to be reconciled with a loving God without losing who God created her to be. This has negatively shaped how women have been viewed in the church throughout the history of the church.

A very rigid scope has been given to women that has excluded them from fully being within themselves who God has created them to be as women both in the church and outside of the church. Chastity, virginity and purity are standards un-proportionately regulated in the life of woman than men. Men have just as greater responsibility than women to control and manage their own body and thoughts. For far too long the responsibility of the body and thoughts of the man and keeping him chaste and pure have been viewed as threatened by the mere presence of the women. The church has taught to fear the women and all that her beautiful essence created by God. This has become the view of sex and the body the talk of it should be feared because to talk of it or acknowledge it or understand it is not seeking to be fully devoted to God or that of

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<sup>62</sup> Minor, Muyskins, and Alexander, *Sex Education*, 16.

seeking purity. These teachings carried down through the centuries has created this fear of the sexes and isolated the women and all of her beauty instead of helping the Christian to learn the self-control and power that a relationship with God brings.

Thank God for those theologians who dared to challenge the views of the early church fathers and those church leaders who came after them yet believed and lived by their same understanding. Other church leaders such as Augustine of Hippo who dared to give a different perspective that has given room for women to be considered for reconciliation and also gives room for space to be made for them in the ranks of Christian leadership and living. These theologian women have permission to live for God and not denounce who they are as instrument of reproduction in order to pursue God with their whole hearts and find him.

Living the ascetic life, or a life of virginity, or celibacy or a life enjoying marriage life as husband and wife which produces a family is all good as long as that life is lived as a born-again believer reconciled back to the creator. It is good for both the male and the female alike. The Christian walk does not come without the responsibility of management of human pride, lust and sin; it comes with a responsibility to be mindful of all of these attributes and for the surrendering of one's life to the control of by the spirit of God for help in accomplishing the goal. This is why it is important and a great thing that the church has evaluated their stance on sex and sexuality and the role and male and females within the Body of Christ over the years. It is also paramount that many churches are seeing the significance of sex education in the church as part of Christian education for both adults and the youth.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Theology is the belief that humanity has about God. It has many facets as numerous as the experiences in one's life. What we believe about God drives every aspect of our lives. It also drives what we believe about other people based on what we believe God says about them. What people believe about God also drives corporate beliefs about God. Throughout the centuries theologies have driven how we live, work, play and conduct ministry. These theologies have also driven the beliefs about who should do ministry be it male or female. Theological views have covered the span of positive, productive, negative, degrading, and oppressive.

As a response to the many theologies that have seemed to repeat what took place in the biblical accounts of the children of Israel in modern times theologies have emerged to challenge the oppressive nature of which these theologies shape the treatment of races, classes, genders, and creeds of people.

Slavery is one of the happenings in life that was driven by theologies. It has been indicated that slavery was supported by God and the word of God. In example, "servants obey your masters..." found in Colossians 3:22 in one scripture used to enslave millions in the United States of America. Stephanie Mitchem states that, "theologies informed the pastoral lives of churches even as churches played roles throughout the history of

colonizing people.”<sup>1</sup> She also states that, “certain strands of thought within Western theology powerfully justified movements such as colonization, slavery, manifest destiny.”<sup>2</sup>

The treatment of women as subservient to men is a belief that was driven by the interpretation of the scripture. Theology has prescribed the difference between races, classes, sexes, creeds and much more throughout history. Theology has been criticized for having a predominately male voice and perspective throughout the ages. This male voice or patriarchal voice is said to have left out the relevance of the redemptive work of Jesus on the Cross for woman, and men of color. Due to this view in the past several centuries there has arisen a need for theology that affirms the redemptive work of Jesus but also includes its relevance to woman and men of color. As a result, we find today such theologies as Latin liberation theology, black theology or black liberation theology, feminist theology and womanist theology.

Liberation theology, feminist theology, and womanist theology seek to define a belief about God that speaks more fluidly to people who seem not to be considered respectfully in the traditional understandings of who God is and how he identifies with them. Liberation, feminist and womanist theology speaks to people whose experience has been that of oppression. Liberation or black theology speaks to African Americans and other oppressed people of the African Diaspora. Feminist theology gives voice to the presence of the women in scripture and in the world, rejecting the patriarchal voice from which it has traditionally been interpreted. Womanist theology gives voice and

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<sup>1</sup> Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 35.

consideration to the unique experience of African American women and woman of color in the world.

Black liberation theology is a theology, which was inspired and derived from Gustavo Gutierrez's Latin liberation theology for Latin people's liberation from oppression by a theologian named James Cone in the 1960s. James Cone believed that there needed to be a theology that spoke specifically to the plight, struggle, oppression and experience of black people especially those of Western Christianity. He noted that until the introduction of black liberation theology Christianity was shaped by a white Western theological perspective that did not and could not speak to God's view, love, and ministry to blacks. He states that it was white western Christianity that made American slavery the horrific institution that it was, enslaving, and oppressing and dehumanizing blacks in the name of God. He states that, "the appearance of Black Theology on the American scene is due primarily to the failure of white religionists to relate the gospel of Jesus to the pain of being black in a white racist society."<sup>3</sup> Cone coined black liberation theology, "to have the task of analyzing the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ in light of oppressed blacks so they will see the gospel as inseparable from their humiliated condition, and also bestowing on them the necessary power to break the chains of oppression."<sup>4</sup> Cone believed that "there can be no theology of the gospel which does not arise from the oppressed community and that Black Theology is Christian Theology

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<sup>3</sup> James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 5.

because it centers on Jesus Christ from which all Christian Theology should have its point of departure.”<sup>5</sup>

James Cone’s black liberation theology has six sources that shape its perspective.<sup>6</sup> These six sources include experience or the reality of the black lived experience in a white racist society; black history including slavery and its way of dehumanizing and eradicating black people; black culture or the pain and joy of reacting to their lived experience in a white racist society; the revelation of God as the God event and his work for the oppressed people; scripture or the biblical witness that says God is indeed a God of liberation; and tradition or theological reflection of the church upon the nature of Christianity from the time of the early church to the present. He believed that all of these six sources have to be considered when helping blacks and people of color to identify Jesus in their everyday existence. In the view of Cone, none of these six sources can be disqualified when helping people of color interpret and apply the gospel to their lived experience.

Womanist theology especially speaks to the unique needs of the population of African American women and women of color because their life experiences have a different rhythm and score that cannot be clumped into a generalist understanding of women. Womanist theology makes this consideration when shaping or challenging the current theological lens that seeks to interpret and define corporate theologies. Womanist theology challenges the notion that all women are alike and have the same life experiences, by exposing the difference in the experience of woman. It looks specifically

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<sup>5</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 24-34.

at the experience of the African American woman in the world and the life of the church and how or what the belief of God needs to be in order to help women identify themselves in the biblical text for application in life.

Stephanie Mitchem in *Introduction to Womanist Theology*, quotes Delores Williams' definition of womanist theology as "attempts to help black woman see, affirm and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African American community."<sup>7</sup> She goes further to state that womanist theology "challenges all oppressive forces impeding black women's struggle for survival and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life conducive to women and the family's freedom and well-being."<sup>8</sup> There is a reason why it was deemed as a need for black women and woman of color to affirm, and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith. Women and especially woman of color have not been given a voice at the table of life and faith, and in particular the Christian religion in a way that provides this affirmation and consideration. Preaching and teaching in a church with predominately African American women needs to be done with a theological framework that speaks to their unique struggle as women growing up in a world that does not consider them as they consider other women. Womanist theology is a theology tailored toward speaking to those unique experiences and how that should be considered in helping them to navigate through faith and life.

Womanist theology was created as a result of feminist theology, which was created by Mary Daly and Rosemary Radford-Ruether, because it did not adequately

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<sup>7</sup> Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 82.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 82.

address or consider the multidimensional plight and struggle of woman of color. Womanist theology seeks to draw from the experiences and meanings of faith in the lives of black women in order to assess doctrinal and ecclesial constructions and reconstructions that have relevance in their lives. According to Anne Clifford in her writing on the history of feminist theology, she states that after the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, the feminist movement died and in the 1960s had a new emergence of a broader women's liberation in both the U.S. and Eastern Europe that included the struggles of African American Woman, this movement was that lead by Rosemary Radford and Mary Daly. According to Radford, focusing more on uncovering, understanding and undoing the many forms of oppression like sexism and the questioning of patriarchal nature of traditional theology. The broader women's liberation continued to become even broader in the 1970s. This new emergence was Womanist theology by Jacquelyn Grant and Delores Williams.

Feminist theology for women of color did not seem to cover liberation and the ending of oppression, discrimination, and violence directed at women especially women of color but sought to generalize all woman together. Delores Williams states that feminist theology was developed by white women and focused exclusively on gender oppression from the view of patriarchy. Patriarchy is the male control, dominance, and preference throughout all institutions of society at the center of all gender oppression.<sup>9</sup> Delores Williams and other womanist theologians viewed the feminist agenda and reality as that which only speaks to the oppression of white woman and their historical experiences and not speaking to the multidimensional experiences of black woman in

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<sup>9</sup> Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 184.

America. She felt that instead of ‘patriarchy,’ ‘demonarchy’ better speaks to the plight of oppression of black woman and woman of color because their experience of dominance and oppression is not just at the hands of white males, but also males of many races along with the participation of white women. Williams’ labels ‘patriarchy’ as the umbrella under which behavior of woman oppressing other women is stationed.<sup>10</sup> By engaging in patriarchy, Williams and other womanist theologians believe that very little serious attention is given to assigning some of the responsibility of women oppressing women; women of upper class status inflicting upon women of lower class.<sup>11</sup> Kim Marie Vaz quotes M. Rivka Polatnick as stating that “in the 1960s a number of black women did not consider themselves part of the “white dominated” women’s movement but part of a wave of women’s rights liberation activism.”<sup>12</sup> M. Rivka goes further to say that “in the 1960s white women who advocated women’s liberation began to make it their central or even exclusive political focus where women of color advocated women’s liberation effort including across racial lines, class and specifically women’s issues.”<sup>13</sup> Mary Townes in her work *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope Salvation and Transformation* quotes Delores Williams as saying that “Womanist’s not only concern ourselves about the liberation of women, we also struggle along with black men and

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<sup>10</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 184.

<sup>11</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 184.

<sup>12</sup> Kim Marie Vaz, ed., “Poor Black Sister Decided for Themselves: A Case Study of 1960s Women’s Liberation Activism,” in *Black Women in America* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 110.

<sup>13</sup> Vaz, “Poor Black Sister,” 111.

children for the liberation, survival and positive quality of life for our entire oppressed black community.”<sup>14</sup>

The identities of African American women is believed to be created from the sources of grassroots organizing, mothering and nurturance, family values, and community networking and activism all of which Stephanie Mitchem states is encompassed in the “the Black Church.” This institution she deems as critically important in the lives of African Americans and African American women. This is what womanist theology speaks to and incorporates when helping to shape the identity and spirituality of African American women and women of color. Delores Williams defines Womanist theology as:

Seeks to help black women see, affirm and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African-American Community. It challenges all oppressive forces impeding black women’s struggle for survival and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life conducive to women’s and the family’s freedom and well-being. Womanist Theology opposes all oppression based on race, sex, class, sexual preference, physical disability and caste...it also branches off in its own direction, introducing new issues and constructing new analytical categories.<sup>15</sup>

The term womanist was coined by Alice Walker in her book entitled, *In Search of our Mother’s Gardens*, where she incorporates the “language, rhythms and meanings of black women.”<sup>16</sup> The term coined by Walker is a derivative of the word womanish from the black folk expression “you acting womanish.”

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<sup>14</sup> Delores Williams, “Straight Talk, Plain Talk: Womanist Words about Salvation in Social Context,” in *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope Salvation and Transformation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 97.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, xiv.

<sup>16</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi-xii.

Mitchem details that Walker believed that womanish expresses the multifaceted nature of the identity of black women and that it includes a commitment to the survival and wholeness of people, male and female. Mitchem believes that womanish and thus womanist theology speaks to the holistic way that black women embrace diversity in them and in others. Williams is quoted saying “Our purpose is to present more precisely what African American women and the African American community have and do believe and to exercise a prophetic womanist theological task in relation to this belief.”<sup>17</sup>

Womanist theology stands on a couple of premises all of which are relevant for understanding this fairly new school of thought. Womanist theology has its roots in both feminist theology and most strongly in liberation and black Theology. Womanist theology addresses the reality that African American women are invisible, disregarded, not considered, shamed, and victims of gender trapping, patriarchy, oppression, and violence. It seeks to take into account the historical and contemporary aspects of women’s lives, political involvement and family life and child rearing.<sup>18</sup> It does not put all women’s experiences into one definition or understanding.<sup>19</sup>

Womanist theology brings to light certain aspects of the Black woman’s experience. In this work, several aspects will be highlighted that will give a framework for understanding womanist theology. The aspects that have been mentioned in the womanist works that have been researched include; the marginalization of Black women;

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<sup>17</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 216-17.

<sup>18</sup> Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 6.

the high prevalence of gender entrapment; Standards of “be a lady,” and the glorification of “Southern Belle” and Sexism.

### Marginalization

In studies of both American culture and society, African American women are perceived as marginal.<sup>20</sup> Whiney Battle-Baptiste states that “Women of African descent, here from the start of the colonial experience, have remained marginal in comparison to men of African descent, Euro-american women and Euro-american property owning men.”<sup>21</sup> African American woman are expected to change who they are and how they operate in order to dance around the definitions and perceptions dictated to them by culture and society. Whitney goes further in speaking of her own marginalization “This marginal existence can become quite bothersome and is why I profess that I have never been “silent” just busy working, cleaning, nursing, raising, teaching, nurturing and existing for generations.”<sup>22</sup> Stephanie Mitchem found that in a study by a literary scholar named Carla Peterson that “positioning at the center tends to be fixed, such is not the case for locations on the periphery which can move, slide along the circumference.”<sup>23</sup> She goes further to state that when looking at African American woman they had to shift, slide, change positions, approaches, strategies and venues to survive. This consistent

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<sup>20</sup> Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Whitney Battle-Baptiste, *Black Feminist Archaeology* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2011), 35.

<sup>22</sup> Battle-Baptiste, *Black Feminist Archaeology*, 35.

<sup>23</sup> Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 6.

shifting and changing has to be taken into account when understanding the identity of black women and also when helping them to find their identity.

### **Gender Entrapment**

African American women fall prey to gender entrapment more so than other women. This plays out especially in the role of girlfriend, friend, and daughter. Gender entrapment is something that Mitchem also highlights as being a reality that African American women face while navigating the unfair judgment in self-presentation. Women throughout history have been taught through charm schools, etiquette courses and the like regarding ways to be ladies and what that looks like both for the individual but also in relation to men and married life. Mitchem put attention to the notion that was created during the Victorian era of a woman's proper sphere of influence. This proper sphere of influence was adopted by American society however, did not take into account that all women do not have the same experience. The notion stated that a women's natural, proper sphere of influence was the home and that women did not work outside the home instead they took care of the home and family. Again, this notion did not take into account African American women and women of color who at that time and even more so today, could not be house wives and stay at home and care for their home. African American women did not have the economic ability to stay and only care for their home, they had to work outside the home and that work was typically as wash ladies, and maids in the homes of white woman. Since this was the expectation of all woman and black women and women of color could not meet that expectation, they were required to qualify their worthiness in other ways.

The glorification of the ‘Southern Belle’ during the pre-civil war era is also a way that black women have had to contend yet again regarding gender entrapment and “be a good lady.” The Southern Belle was the visual definition of women based on such characteristics as those depicted by the character of Scarlet O’Hara in the novel and movie ‘Gone with the Wind’. A woman was expected to look, sound, dress, have the means, and communicate like this character. This did not fit the context of African American women. When African American women cannot function at that capacity they are made to feel less than a woman and find themselves in trouble trying to fit that definition in their own homes and families. Mitchem highlights that African American women were expected to be genteel and subservient even unto situations of rape where resistance threatened the entire family. The world was cold, hard and unjust for African American women and women of color this definition was not considerate of them. Good social behavior took on a different meaning for women of color. There were other expectations of them stemming from slavery such as being over sexualized and being the target of white man’s sexual exploits that made standards like genteel and subservient detrimental for women of color. This expectation was highlighted in African American Christianity Essays in History titled “The Politics of “Silence”: Dual-Sex Political Systems and Women’s Traditions of Conflict in African American Religion.”<sup>24</sup> It highlighted that “the organization of gender in the black community, has been influenced by the manner in which black people extracted meaning from their experience as slavery in the antebellum south.<sup>25</sup> This extracted meaning was brought to bear on such questions

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<sup>24</sup> Paul E. Johnson, *African American Christianity Essays in History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 85.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson, *African American Christianity Essays in History*, 85.

as the proper role of women in black social life.”<sup>26</sup> It went further to note that after slavery the role of the black women was based on her capabilities, the needs of the race, and the ways black people were expected to adopt in order to become acceptable members of the dominant culture.<sup>27</sup> Delores Williams highlights that also during the antebellum south African American women served as friend, advisor, surrogate mistress, and mother.<sup>28</sup>

We also find this same expectation today with the push out of African American girls in our schools. African American girls are quickly sent to the principal’s office and given a day home when they speak out and are considered hostile and argumentative, when girls of different races get more consideration and seen as just attitudinal or upset and are given detention or sent to in house suspension.<sup>29</sup>

*Expectation of being “a Good Lady” from the Black Community*

There were also expectations put on black women from the black church tradition. Women were constantly taught that the way a women dresses are code for her treatment and labeling by the members of the church. Short hair, pants, short skirts, an uncovered head, tank tops, uncovered arms, form fitting clothing, and types of shoes all were considered code for how women in church were defined and treated. These items had strict parameters and many women have been made to feel less worthy and not good

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<sup>26</sup> Johnson, *African American Christianity Essays in History*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, *African American Christianity Essays in History*, 85.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 63.

<sup>29</sup> Martha Rial, “A Story of Two Girls: Why Being Black Means More Scrutiny and Punishment in Pittsburgh Schools,” accessed April 5, 2017, <http://blackgirlspgh.publicsource.org>.

enough because of their lack of adherence to it. African American woman have natural differences for which they have constantly found themselves needing to prove themselves. They are constantly being told that their differences disqualify them from beauty and worthiness. Their hair is too kinky and nappy and their skin is too dark and their nose is too wide. Also, they have bodies that are abnormal and grotesque and, they talk funny and uneducated or are angry and hostile.

### *Sexuality and Sexism*

To tie into the gender entrapment of women, sexism is another area where African American Woman have been marginalized, left out, and questioned as worthy woman. Historically black women have been viewed as more non-woman and beautiful than as woman and beautiful. Black woman and woman of color have been viewed as sexually compulsive and available and labeled as tramps. Their bodies have been viewed as grotesque and aesthetically displeasing. One example is that of African Saartjie 'Sarah' Baartman whose body was put on public display and exposed in exposition fashion and put on national display while she was living then dissected and studied and stored in a lab when she died. Black women were made to feel more like circus animals than human beings.

Even though a lot of what Mitchem highlights in her book are references to the 60s, 50s, pre-civil war and the colonies; these views of Black Woman and thus African American Woman has been passed down through the generations, which informs others of what is viewed as reality. These teachings have effected generations and are still found today along with lasting stereotypes that our shaping the perceptions and treatments of

young African American women. Instead of national display as Sarah Barrtman was subjected to we have video vixens which are African American women wearing tight cloths to accentuate their thick thighs and voluptuous breasts and large gluteus maximus while dancing in rape videos.

### *Womanist Response to Feminism*

Jacquelyn Grant is celebrated as a phenomenal voice for explaining the differences between womanist and feminist theology and the need for womanist theology in light of these differences. In her book, she gives a response to feminist theology where she addresses certain realities of feminist theology. She looks at the limitations of feminist theology; feminist theology as racist; and concludes by looking at the beginning of womanist theology with a special reference to Christology. She also dresses the use of the Bible in womanist theology; the significance of Jesus; and challenges to womanist theology.

Grant states that, “Feminist Theology is white in terms of their race and in terms of the nature of the sources they use for the development of their theological perspectives.”<sup>30</sup> What she means is that the lenses from which feminist see their theology is primarily through the lens of the white woman’s experience. The experience is significantly different between the two and that difference must be acknowledged. She addresses that fact that the experience of slavery and servitude alone created some differences.

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<sup>30</sup> Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 195.

First slavery was one of the most abominable systems in history, which caused severe oppression for black men, women and children. The first experience of most black women in the United States was under the system of slavery. Black women and white woman as Grant states “were not sisters” and thus did not make black women exempt from the tyranny of the system. She further notes that in many cases white women were active participants in the system as the white men in that they were the administers of the brutality as mistresses. Second, emancipation or the abolition of slavery for many black people was slavery without chains.<sup>31</sup> It did not bring about change in the image of or condition of black people in the United States.<sup>32</sup> Grant notes that the idea that blacks where intended to service white America, remained intact even after the abolition of slavery.

Blacks where still treated like slaves, animals, and not worthy of human dignity in jobs, or livelihood in anyway and were given sharecropping and farm work, factory jobs, and menial employment opportunities.<sup>33</sup> This was true for black women as well; they were relegated to the same type of work as the black men. Grant also notes that black women made up a significant percentage of domestic service workers.<sup>34</sup> Violence against blacks also continued. Servant class also continued to be viewed as those who needed to be lorded over and that was especially true in the case of black women working as maids and service workers of white woman. White woman asserted their power to oppress and

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<sup>31</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 197.

<sup>32</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 197.

<sup>33</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 197.

<sup>34</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 197.

perpetuate the beliefs that black women should be viewed and treated as inferior by society.

Grant makes the stance that even though individual feminist are not racists the movement has taken on some racist characteristics. She quotes C. Eric Lincoln in order to give reason for her thoughts. He states that “in order for racism to flourish in American there must be an extensive climate of acceptance and participation by large numbers of people. The individual members together give power to the group with their collective racist behavior by action and inaction.”<sup>35</sup> Grant continues his thought by affirming that in a racist society the oppressor assumes the power of the definition and control while the oppressed is objectified and perceived as a thing.<sup>36</sup> They do this by primarily appealing to the white feminist experience and calling it all women’s experience. In doing this they define the rules and then solicit others to play the game.<sup>37</sup> This commonality is not something that oppressed women share with white women.

Womanist theology challenges whether or not a woman’s faith challenges her to struggle against the odds. It challenges black proponents to feminist theology to adopt a spirit of cooperation towards liberation and reconciliation and to take women’s role more seriously. Womanist theology also calls for the church to extend its principles of proclamation of liberation to women. It also exposes the various forms of oppression. These forms include racism, sexism, classism, and imperialism.<sup>38</sup> It also encourages the

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<sup>35</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 199.

<sup>36</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 199.

<sup>37</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 199.

<sup>38</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 209.

church to let go of traditional oppressive attitudes towards women and to advance black women's liberation in church and society.<sup>39</sup>

Womanist theology also looks at the black women's experience perspective through the biblical story of Hagar slave women versus Sarah wife of Abraham.<sup>40</sup> Grant notes that the source for black women's understanding of God is twofold. First, God's revelation directly to them and secondly, God's revelation as witnessed in the Bible and as read and heard in the context of their experience.<sup>41</sup> She states that, "The understanding of God as creator, sustainer, comforter, and liberator took on life as they agonized over their pain, and celebrated the hope that as God delivered the Israelites, they would be delivered as well."<sup>42</sup> Black women are able to identify with liberation found in the Bible to help them deal with seeking liberation.

Mitchem proposes that the reality of suffering must be part of the analysis of black women's understanding of salvation, meaning that Jesus is present in the troubles. Mitchem offers that an analysis of suffering is not sufficient; it must also include the black women's self-liberating actions within her explorations. She observes that sadness and the grace filled transforming moments must be recognized as components of the womanists understanding of salvation.<sup>43</sup>

Womanist theology addresses the traditional voice in which scripture has been interpreted. It acknowledges that traditionally male's theological and Christological

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<sup>39</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 210.

<sup>40</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 207.

<sup>41</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 211.

<sup>42</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 211.

<sup>43</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*.

arguments have defined theology and Christology in universal terms.<sup>44</sup> Grant highlights that viewing theology and Christology from a universal approach has inherent problems. She shares that liberationist propose that theology must emerge out of particular experiences of the oppressed people. She quotes James Cone as saying that Christian theology is human speech about God, it is always related to historical situations, and in all of its assertions, which are culturally limited.<sup>45</sup> Also, that theology unlike God is limited by history and time just like them who interpret it. This makes “our image of God finite and limited by the temporality and particularity of our existence.”<sup>46</sup> She goes further to quote Jon Sobrino saying that:

If Christ is the foundation of all, then any study of Christ must undertake to explain first what that ‘all’ signifies.” In short, it must offer some understanding of the world, the person, history, sin, liberation, and so forth: or at the very least, it must spell out at the start how it focuses on that ‘all.’<sup>47</sup>

With this in mind Grant states that, “Since experience is the context in which Christology interpretation takes place, before women begin to reflect on Jesus Christ, they must claim the power to name themselves and their experience so that their Christological reflections would be authentically theirs.”<sup>48</sup> She goes further to address that historically the women’s experience has been that of a generic male experience and articulated using male dominated language describing the universal male experience. Womanist theology believes that this masculine way of interpreting the human experience in scripture is

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<sup>44</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ*, 11.

inadequate to deal with the situation of women and is concerned about exposing this interpretation and reinterpret inclusive of the woman's experience. Womanist theology seeks to bring to light this understanding and to shake the foundation of this traditional practice in order that the experiences of woman may be more of a consideration and not viewed as the same as everyone else.

Although this is the belief of many scholars, others provide a counter argument. Phillis Isabella Sheppard in *Self, Culture and Others in Womanist Practical Theology* states that current womanist theology and ethics demonstrate the relationship between womanist scholarship and practice, however, its theological commitment are background and secondary influence rather than primary and explicit. She goes further to state that theoretically it focuses on the cultural impact of racism, sexism as well as the social aspect of personal pain.<sup>49</sup> She says,

Black woman's historically conditioned sources of resisting suffering include the memory of past injustices as well as actions to create a self-defined future; language, especially sass, which is audacious, bold, and willful words that guard identity; and religion, the Christianity shaped by African values, oppressed conditions, and, based interaction with biblical texts. Ultimately then, a womanist theology of suffering is redemptive as black women invite God to partner with them in the redemptive work of Black people.<sup>50</sup>

Mitchem purports that suffering is redemptive in that it may lead to critical rethinking of meaning or purpose and such reexamination is part of the process of human maturation. To her, suffering is a starting point for thinking about salvation and the human experience with God.

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<sup>49</sup> Phillis Isabella Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 42.

<sup>50</sup> Sheppard, *Self, Culture*, 42.

## Conclusion

A theology for the suffering must speak to the unique experiences and ways of coping with those experiences. The belief of God must speak to the multidimensional way in which the believer has processed and navigated their life experiences. A theology that successfully speaks to their experience identifies with their experience and gives liberation to their experience at the same time. The theology should not perpetuate the oppressive experience. The theology cannot be a voice for one or some but not all. As explained above womanist theology emerged from feminist theology and seeks to speak to the different experience that African American women and women of color have that predominately white woman do not. It seeks to give voice and consider the experience that seems to be silenced and not acknowledged at the table of theology.

Feminist theology has some of the same goals and precepts as womanist theology, however it has been accused of being an accomplice to patriarchy in that it seems to put all experiences into one experience and with the primary focus being placed on the experience of the white woman. It does not consider that even though women are, wives, mothers, daughters, nieces and cousins there are differing experiences and oppression experienced by one may be experienced at a deeper level by the other. A theology that speaks to and for these different experiences must encompass that knowledge.

Working predominately with women of color and helping them to see themselves as wonderfully and uniquely made and purposed by God is a challenge within itself. However, to be effective in accomplishing this task one must consider the way in which they navigate and process life. It must also account for the unique experience that they

may have and whether or not it is one of being oppressed. This oppression has to be addressed and identified in scripture and it must give what God says about this experience and how he speaks to this experience.

A theology that gives voice to the unique historical experience of African American women is also useful for working with young African American women and women of color that share the experiences of oppression. The expectations on African American women is different than her counterparts and this must be understood, acknowledged and addressed in the biblical context. Grant says it best when saying “To do womanist theology, then, we must read and hear the Bible and engage it within the context of our own experience; this is the only way that it can make sense to people who are oppressed.”<sup>51</sup>

Katie Canon when looking at Howard Thurman’s exposition of the sacredness and inherent worth of every human being as the *imago dei* highlights his description of oppression as “When oppressed people experience God, why they experience the essence of what it means to be created in God’s image and their spiritual quest of wholeness begins.”<sup>52</sup> Howard Thurman also says in his writings on oppression that we “can act to shock the oppressor into a state of upheaval and insecurity.”<sup>53</sup> It is believed that Thurman means when we seek God through oppression we find him while experiencing his liberating power.

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<sup>51</sup> Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 212.

<sup>52</sup> Katie G. Canon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 161.

<sup>53</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Cokebury Press, 1949), 21.

Katie Canon along with other Womanist theologians seek to harness a theology in Womanist Theology that “helped African American Women and women of color who have experienced enslavement, segregation and discrimination know that their oppression does not originate with the defect in their personhood but is part of the spiritual ruthlessness in a white oriented society.”<sup>54</sup> Just as Howard Thurman believed and thought, and Katie Canon highlighted in her writings on Womanist Theology this must be communicated and taught to African American women and women of color.<sup>55</sup> Canon also believes that “God addresses the deepest needs and aspiration of the human spirit so that those who are oppressed and disinherited can act with ingenuity and dexterity against the judgments of the denigrating environment from the center of their informed hearts.”<sup>56</sup>

Who is God and how should I name him in the experience of woman of color? Where is the woman of color in the scripture and how do you help a young woman of color identify herself in the story of redemption and salvation? Who are African American woman to the local Christian assembly and what relevance does she have there? Womanist theology seeks to find the answers to these questions in order to comprehensively answer questions of identity and encourage a faith in God who is acquainted with suffering and identifies with grief and helps to successfully navigate the meaning of it all in this life and beyond.

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<sup>54</sup> Katie G. Canon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 161.

<sup>55</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 28.

<sup>56</sup> Canon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 161.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Through the decades the responsibility to help youth understand what happens in their bodies in the years of puberty and adolescence has been bounced back and forth from families, schools, social service agencies and churches. The conversation of sex education and human development has become very complex and the need of continued education is increasing. Young people should not be left alone to figure out what is happening in their bodies on their own. The church was once the moral and human development foundation, however, practitioners have deviated from the church because of the accusation of being too rigid and the use of punitive edicts. Although vast resources are available for discussing changes within the body of youth within the secular environment, there is not an abundance of resources available within the church environment.

This chapter seeks to give examples of what curricula is available for the church, what is available for the schools as well as give an over view of what these curricula offer as support for helping young people properly process and navigate the turbulent years of puberty and adolescence. Three curricula are presented that have been offered in churches throughout the United States 1) The Octopus Training for communities and churches, 2) the Catholic Churches Catechesis on human development; and 3) the Created by God Faith based curriculum. I will also look at two models that are used and

available in local libraries that give support both to heterosexual and homosexual identifying youth. This chapter also gives a look at the research that has served as the foundation for expressing the importance of knowing what happens in the years of puberty and adolescence. It gives an understanding of sex education historically and how it has been influenced over the years in the United States. The influential voices and their work is highlighted in the chapter as well. Such notable psychologist as Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson are highlighted and their understanding of what happens and what they prescribe should happen in the life and minds of adolescence.

All of what is presented should help to acknowledge the continued need for the church to be influential voices in helping young people navigate the confusing and tumultuous vital years. It will also help in prescribing that these years are vital for the establishment of relationship with God and in helping them to understand his purpose contrary to the prescription that society gives.

Sex education has been a topic for the past several decades. It has been debated as it relates to what age is appropriate to begin the discussion with young people on the topic, whether or not it should be taught in the schools as well as how much should be discussed in schools. It has also been debated whether or not it should be taught in the church and lastly who should have the discussion with young people. In the 1960s traditions of the Christian church such as Presbyterian and Catholic started endorsing teaching sex education in the school systems and offering seminars for different age groups within their churches. At first it was the collective belief that sex education should be the responsibility of the family and specifically parents, however, with the issue of teen pregnancy over the past decades the perceived need for sex education has

been viewed as a wide spread need. Many churches by the 1970s adapted Christian Family Life Centers whose goal was to educate about sex and also conduct character education.<sup>1</sup>

Now sex education has become more of a priority and has been adapted over the years to include sexuality training as well. Sexuality for the purposes of this work specifically refers to sexual identity. Churches are finding it necessary to talk with young people about life development and sex and sexuality as well as the schools and counseling agencies. The rise in the amount of people and especially young people identifying as homosexuals, bisexual, transgendered, questioning, has warranted the need to support, protect and encourage youth identifying as part of this community.

Sex education in the school system is usually human anatomy and is taught during health class in middle schools and high schools. It is usually taught from a text book such as scholastic books which is a classic school curriculum. These books are designed to help young people get familiar with their sexual organs and the functions of them as part of the human anatomy. The text books also touch upon such anatomy topics as the conception, nurturing and delivery of a baby as well as healthy eating, exercise and living.

One such training model is called 'The Octopus Training Manual' it is a manual on sex education for health professionals, parents, pastors, and youth workers in a church setting that was established in 1980 by a public health department in Southern Illinois. The Octopus Training's purpose is to promote open communication on the understanding of sexuality and to prevent unplanned pregnancy. It is one of a couple of trainings that I

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis P. Bird and Christopher T. Reilly, *Learning to Love: A Guide to Sex Education Through the Church* (Waco, TX: Word Book Publisher, 1971), 40.

have found exist within the Christian church. There are also a couple of books written by Christian writers that talk about talking with youth of all ages about their body and sexual development.

The Octopus Training includes conversation with not only youth but also the family unit and community and results in a more comprehensive learning experience.<sup>2</sup>

The Octopus Training model solicits and recruit's members for all areas of the community for participation in the teaching of sex education and this includes the church. Psychologist, pastors, teachers, medical professionals, and other people who have an expertise and relationship with young people are all brought to the same table for training and implementation of the course. The preferred location for this training is the church, because it is was deemed as the place with a more captive youth and parent audience and is a place of community.

The Octopus Training is designed to take place within the church with the parent playing a significant role along with the community partners (experts). The experts seek to establish and maintain a safe, comfortable and supportive environment within the church where the conversation and teaching can take place.<sup>3</sup> Its expressed goal is to enhance family communication, to get parents to accept their role as the primary sex educators; and where abstinence will be encouraged in order to impact the teen pregnancy rate.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Debra Braunling-McMorrow et al., *Sex Education in a Church Setting: The Octopus Training Manual* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1987), x.

<sup>3</sup> Braunling-McMorrow et al., *Sex Education in a Church Setting*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Braunling-McMorrow et al., *Sex Education in a Church Setting*, 22.

This training model is broken into three major sections and four subsections in the second section and an evaluation tool explained in the third and final section. The first section includes instructions on program development and details steps to ascertain community, church and program participants for the implementation of the course. The four subsections that contain the meat of the sex education course and the contents of the second major section of the course include:

Session 1, Part A: Program Introduction: Why we're here  
Session 1, Part B: Family Communication: Getting Started  
Session 2, Part A: Family Communication: Some possibilities that work  
Session 2, Part B: Love and Relationships: How do you know for sure?  
Session 3, Part A: Reproductive Anatomy, Birth Control Methods and Sexually Transmitted Diseases: Basic Information.  
Section 3, Part B: Decision Making: Make it Choice, Not Chance  
Section 4, Part A: Family Communication: Practicing What you Preach  
Section 4, Part B: The Church's View: Sexuality and Related Issues.<sup>5</sup>

The Octopus Training is designed to be very basic in its discussion and is considered more of an introduction to helping parents discuss sexual development and its implications for relationships, making decisions, and to avoid teen pregnancy. It utilizes discussion, videos, group interaction and homework for both the parent and the youth. Topics such as self-esteem, healthy body image, and health and hygiene are excluded from the discussion. These components can be added to the discussion as introductions to talking about the importance of knowing about your body and the purpose and function of your reproductive organs.

The Catholic Church has found it important to have a catechism on sex education with families and members of its church. It encourages that education begins at home and can be supported outside the home, just as the Octopus Training purports. They

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<sup>5</sup> Braunling-McMorrow et al., *Sex Education in a Church Setting*, v.

believe that parents and guardians alike should be talking with their children early in life and should also be modeling a healthy relationship, which includes healthy interaction, communication and affection. They believe that “the crucial function of the family life is to provide individual members with a sense of self-worth.”<sup>6</sup> As an address for the growing need deemed by United States Catholic Conference and the administrative board of the United States Catholic Bishops, the National Committee for Human Sexuality Education was birthed.<sup>7</sup> This committee was the project created to give guidance to sex education efforts in the U.S. This model serves as a curriculum guideline model that starts with a theological statement and is split into four parts giving specific guidelines for discussion and planning.<sup>8</sup> The guidelines are based on seven general principles. These principals are in accordance with the Vatican’s guidelines on sexual ethics. It is written in the prescribed free-form prose style instead of an academic approach that includes graphs and academic language.<sup>9</sup> The guidelines are not rigid in presentation on purpose with the hope that they would be used in a flexible and creative way.

### *The Seven Theological Principles*

The council’s guidelines have seven theological principles and seven goals that drive their sexuality education course. The seven principles include:

1. Each person is created unique in the image of God;

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<sup>6</sup> The National Committee for Human Sexuality Education, *Education in Human Sexuality for Christians* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> The National Committee for Human Sexuality Education, *Education in Human Sexuality*.

<sup>8</sup> The National Committee for Human Sexuality Education, *Education in Human Sexuality*.

<sup>9</sup> The National Committee for Human Sexuality Education, *Education in Human Sexuality*.

2. Despite original sin, all human life in its physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions is fundamentally good;
3. Each person is created to be loved and to love, as Christ, loved by the Father, loves us;
4. Human relationships are expressed in a way that is enfleshed and sexed;
5. Human sexuality carries the responsibility to work toward Christian sexual maturity;
6. Mature Christian sexuality, in whatever state of life, demands a life-enriching commitment to other persons and the community;
7. Conjugal sexuality is an expression of the faithful, life-enriching love of husband and wife and is ordained toward the loving procreation of new life.<sup>10</sup>

The seven goals of National Committee for Human Sexuality Education curriculum include:

1. The person will develop a deep appreciation that he or she is a unique reflection of God, and, therefore, possesses inestimable worth.
2. The person will acknowledge and understand the physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of his or her nature as fundamentally good.
3. The person will be open to receive love and will love others in accord with his or her level of maturation.
4. The person will be open to the growth which takes place within interpersonal life and will participate in relationships as a sexual persona in accord with his or her own state of life.
5. The person will appreciate the responsibility demanded in the transition from immature self-centeredness to mature Christian altruism and generosity.
6. The person will appreciate the role played by sexuality in establishing relationships of commitment and fidelity.

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<sup>10</sup> The National Committee for Human Sexuality Education, *Education in Human Sexuality*.

7. The person will appreciate the fundamental purposes of Christian marriage by affirming the mutually related unitive and procreative ends of the sacramental relationship.<sup>11</sup>

The Council on Human Sexuality also has prescribed an understanding on what is taking place during the years of development. They stress the importance for parents to understand what is going on during each stage of a child's life starting from birth to eighteen years of age. The years that are important for the purposes of this project are arranged as nine to eleven (the middle school years) and twelve to fourteen (the junior high years). The middle school years are prescribed as the years that a preadolescent will be willing to learn about sex and sexuality both from the human development stand point as well as in the Christian arena with Christian principles with their parent and or a trusting adult approved by their parents in a group setting. During these years preadolescents are able to learn appropriate ways to interact with the opposite sex and understand psychosexual functioning. The preadolescent will understand what is being communicated about sex and sexuality in the media and society and will be able to evaluate appropriate and inappropriate.

During the junior high years, the adolescent is experiencing their first real interaction with the opposite sex in dating relationships. These years come with a lot of insecurity and unease both with the parents and the adolescent as detailed by the council. These are the years outlined by the council when feelings are met with interaction that heightens the feelings already being experienced and it is important to help the junior high youth to successfully navigate all of those feelings appropriately by teaching life

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<sup>11</sup> The National Committee for Human Sexuality Education, *Education in Human Sexuality*.

principles.<sup>12</sup> Lewis Bird and Christopher T. Reilly in their book on *Learning to Love: A Guide to Sex Education* through the church state that youth in the six grade possesses insufficient information, considerable misinformation, and inadequate if not wrong language about sexuality.<sup>13</sup>

The guise for teaching sex education that the council prescribes has a threefold purpose for formal sex education instruction along with the goals and theological principles highlighted above. These purposes include:

1. Promote sexual identity by enabling young people to increase their understanding and communication of self and others as sexual persons.
2. To enable each student to develop, clarify, and integrate the values regarding their relations with others which are conditioned by maleness and femaleness.
3. To enable to learner to act responsibly as a Christian regarding their sexuality.<sup>14</sup>

This sex education course then works through the seven principals and related goals per age range and grade level incorporating the purpose and understanding of what is going on with the youth at that age. The course does not give a curriculum guideline that must be followed with details of session activities on a set duration of time. It gives a guise for how they believe that sex education should be done with youth from birth to eighteen years of age both in the church and in the school.

The Created by God faith based curriculum is one written by a Christian author and published by the Abingdon Press. This is a more update curriculum that details all of

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<sup>12</sup> The National Committee for Human Sexuality Education, *Education in Human Sexuality*.

<sup>13</sup> Bird and Reilly, *Learning to Love*, 35.

<sup>14</sup> The National Committee for Human Sexuality Education, *Education in Human Sexuality*.

the human development changes and needs that an early pubescent youth needs to be made aware of. This curriculum is for both male and female youth and specifically targets the topics of tweens, faith, and human sexuality. It is comprised of six chapters and an introduction and a glossary of terms.<sup>15</sup> The curriculum chapters include information from making youth aware of the changes during the years of puberty complete with diagrams of both the female and male private area. The curriculum touches upon health and hygiene as well. The content is sure to cover a way to approach talking about the creation story as well as approaching the conversation on LGBTQ identifying youth. The curriculum is very kid friendly and is not rigid or over powering or controlling in anyway and gives good general information for this topic and all youth regardless of gender and racial identification. The curriculum gives a very good model for how sessions should flow with youth. It comes complete with a parent's guide book, a book for the youth and a CD guide for the facilitator.

### *Sex Education Historically*

Sex education is something that has been deemed needed in the United States schools since the 1960s. The need to talk with young people about their bodies was important in order to combat the increasing prevalence of teen pregnancy outside of marriage. It was highly judged as immoral or sinful because teens engaged in sexual intercourse outside of the marriage union. The contraction of venereal diseases was also of high concern. The increased freedom in talk about sex and sexuality since the roaring twenties and thirties also made it important to begin to talk with young people and to help

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<sup>15</sup> James H. Ritchie Jr., *Created by God: Tweens, Faith and Human Sexuality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009).

them navigate the years of sexual maturity. As a result, sex education courses have been established to teach about the female and male reproduction system with the learning of terms, concepts and vocabulary words in order to learn the reproduction system and its parts and functions. Early sex education taught the roles played by the male and female in relationships but not for the purposes of helping them to make wise choices for life but to uphold the moral law and prescription already established.

Patricia Schiller in *Creative Approaches to Sex Education and Counseling*, states that the early moral codes regarding sex and sexuality came from moral and legal codes that were derived from tribal sex customs, communal folklore dealing with human sexual conduct and by common law as well as laws that were written and often codified.<sup>16</sup> She goes further to state that the most significant source of influence is the Bible.<sup>17</sup> She states that its teachings permeated the sexual attitudes, values, and behavior of the entire Judeo-Christian world and to operate contrary to its absolutes concerning human sexual behavior was to face the wrath of the community and religious leaders. To engage in behavior or activity contrary to it also meant the labeling as immoral or even infidel.<sup>18</sup> This she prescribes brought about a controlling and dominating attitude to the talk, teaching and instruction on sex education because it was based on strict conduct codes.

These codes caused sex education to have more of a negative, shaming, and punitive tone. Students were afraid to acknowledge the real experiences they were having within their bodies including the mind. She does also state that where the Bible is used to

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<sup>16</sup> Patricia Schiller, *Creative Approaches to Sex Education and Counseling* (New York, NY: Associated Press, 1973).

<sup>17</sup> Schiller, *Creative Approaches to Sex Education*.

<sup>18</sup> Schiller, *Creative Approaches to Sex Education*.

cast a negative tone, its teachings present that human sexuality is deeply embedded in the human personality and that sex is a gift of God.<sup>19</sup> The Book of Genesis is highlighted in that it states that when God created male and female he called it “good” and in this God was including the total being including its sexuality.

Conversations about sex in society have gone from very restrictive to very open and inclusive. The conversations have shifted from the Comstock Laws of 1873 to talks about the needs of different sexual orientation than heterosexual both in society and in schools.<sup>20</sup> The Comstock Laws created by Anthony Comstock a secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice and they made the talking about any form of sex absence as well as talk about contraception.

The research of such psychologists as Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Havelock Ellis and are some of the leading understandings of human sexuality that have shaped what the world has understood to be how a person’s sexual self is developed through the life stages since the 1920s and 1930s. Their research has helped to develop the stages of life development and what is important at each stage that makes sex education a very necessary part of the development of adolescence. Schiller notes that their research also helped to make talk about human sexuality more of a regular conversation in society, first

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<sup>19</sup> Schiller, *Creative Approaches to Sex Education*.

<sup>20</sup> Schiller, *Creative Approaches to Sex Education*.

with the intellectual community and then with the invention of the magazines and mass media everyday society.<sup>21</sup>

The advances and changes in society such as the introduction of the birth control pill, abortion, the offering of higher education to both women and men as well as the influence of the social sciences all play a role in the view that sex education is very necessary. Many organizations have found it important to promote the need for sex education courses in schools and churches including churches through the decades. Just to name a few- American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors, the National Council of Churches, the National Council of Family Relations and the National Education Association. Schiller highlights the American Association of Sex Education and Counselors as the professional organization that is responsible for the training of professionals and others in both sex education and sex counseling.

The Sex Information and Education Council (SIECUS) is noted for being a very widely used resource for promoting human sexuality as a healthy aspect of human personality. The federal government is cited as not being consistent in its promotion of sex education through the decades. The Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare issued many policy statements that remained active for short periods of time including Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was passed by congress in 1965. It funded the family life and sex-education programs which were unfunded years later and is making a rise again now.

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<sup>21</sup> Schiller, *Creative Approaches to Sex Education*.

The department supports experimental programs in education but not long standing programs.

#### *Sample Sex Education Models Located in Libraries*

The teen non-fiction section of most public libraries is full of books helping to guide adolescence through the years of puberty and changes to their bodies. There are books that give details of both the female and male reproductive systems, and growing up guides both for heterosexual youth and Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (GLBTQ) youth. It is easy to find a book with diagrams and illustrations with both scientific and socialized understandings of the life, body and mind of an adolescent. For example, the book, *What's Happening to My Body: Book for Girls* by Lynda Madaras walks girls who are preparing for or entering the years of puberty through all of the complex changes that are happening in their bodies as well as gives them a guide on the changes in responsibility that they now have to the care of the body. Lynda is exhaustive in her details of all of the changes that are occurring. She starts off her book with an introduction for parents then she begins by talking about the developmental stage of puberty with young girls. She details throughout her book such things as the definition of sex in all of its forms to the male and female sex organs to sexual intercourse and its results to the female menstruation cycle and then moves down to graphic details of all of the changes that happen in the body of a young girls as she is going through the years of puberty. Lynda spares no illustration as she helps young girls understand inside and out the uncomfortableness of the years of puberty and adolescence.

Lynda Madaras breaks down each aspect of what is going on in the stage of puberty. She does not grab major themes and talk about them, instead, she provides an in-depth review of what is actually happening in the body, mind and environment of the young person. The overview is detailed to alleviate pending questions. She does not leave room for misunderstanding. Madaras talks about romantic and sexual feelings, which includes a section talking about homosexual feelings. The community and church curricula did discuss the topic of sexual feelings. She also highlights that she is able to talk as freely as she is because society has become freer than it once was in talking about what happens in the human body and especially the female body, as a result of growth and development.<sup>22</sup> In her section on homosexual feelings she highlights what it means to be a homosexual youth. She highlights that homo means same and that having homosexual feelings means having romantic feelings, fantasies, dreams, or crushes about someone of the same sex.<sup>23</sup> She explains that homosexual feelings are normal for a lot of people and that everyone has had some type of homosexual feeling even during growth and development. Madras states that the difference is when as an adult a person has homosexual feelings that are directed most strongly toward the same sex.<sup>24</sup> She went further to say that one in ten adults are homosexual.<sup>25</sup> She provides insight of the word “gay” being a non-insulting term used for homosexuals and that lesbian is the term for female homosexuals. She broke down the meaning of the term *hetero* being ‘different.’

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<sup>22</sup> Lynda Madaras, *The What's Happening to My Body: Book for Girls* (New York, NY: New Market Press, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Madaras, *The What's Happening to My Body*.

<sup>24</sup> Madaras, *The What's Happening to My Body*.

<sup>25</sup> Madaras, *The What's Happening to My Body*.

Madaras explains that whether or not homosexuality is unnatural, abnormal or a sign of a mental sickness. She states that it is a personal matter and that historically people have believed it to be sinful however, many people view homosexual as perfectly healthy, normal, and acceptable.<sup>26</sup> She also defines bisexual as “the equal attraction to male and female and whose sexual activities may involve either sex.”<sup>27</sup> An additional point is stressed that if a person has a lot of homosexual thoughts as a youth and experience relations with someone from the same sex does not mean that the person will be a homosexual in adulthood. She explains that there are people who knew when they were teenagers and younger that they were homosexual. Further, individuals indicated that their homosexual feelings developed at different stages in their lives.

### *Curricula for GLBTQ Youth*

The numbers of resources to help youth who identify with the GLBTQ community are growing rapidly. As society has become more accepting the need for more resources to help homosexual youth navigate the years of development has increased. In libraries, today you can find books on homosexuality, bisexuality, transgender, and A-sexual behavior. Many of the books provide a survival guide for navigating the adolescent and teen years. One such book is titled *GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Teens* written by Kelly Huegel. It is not a curriculum for schools for the churches however; it gives an extensive understanding of the psychological development of a teen that identifies as GLBTQ. It is

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<sup>26</sup> Madaras, *The What's Happening to My Body*.

<sup>27</sup> Madaras, *The What's Happening to My Body*, 214-215.

a book that gives information provided by experts such as psychologist and sociologist, as it relates to sex and sexuality and helping a youth be a happy and healthy GLBTQ identifying youth. It is both a book for those teens that identify and those teens who are figuring everything out or questioning. She begins her book with the statement in the introduction that the book is to be used as a guide and that when it comes to questions about GLBTQ there are not a lot of cut and dry answers. She also states that the book is to help youth, regardless of their sexual preference, get to know themselves and become comfortable with who they are.<sup>28</sup>

Kelly Huegel provides eleven chapters of insight and information similar to what you would find in a sex education book however, less of the reproductive organs and understanding of what happens with the changing body. She looks at topics that are deemed important to GLBTQ youth at the stage of adolescence and teen years. She begins her book with GLBTQ 101 and in this chapter, she gives a terminology, a biology lesson and science behind GLBTQ. She also gives information on exploring who you are and myths, generalizations and what she calls just plain absurd ideas about GLBTQ people. She cites the American Psychological Associations definition of sexual orientation as “an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to men, women, or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to an individual’s sense of identity based on that pattern.”<sup>29</sup> She also states that according to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States-gender identity is “the internal sense that people have that they are female, male, or some variation of these. Also, that

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<sup>28</sup> Kelly Huegel, *GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Teens* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Company, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Huegel, *GLBTQ*, 7.

“biological sex is based on chromosomes and sexual anatomy and gender identity are the same.”<sup>30</sup>

In her biology lesson, Huegel states that there is not a 100% clear answer for why some youth identify and other youth do not. She indicates that a large amount of research has been conducted to determine what makes people GLBTQ. One such report is the Kinsey Report, which was conducted on men in the 1940s by a scientist named Dr. Alfred Kinsey.<sup>31</sup> This research looked at the presence of heterosexual and homosexual orientation in men. The research indicated that men were neither either or but a mix and that where some fell close to one end, some fall somewhere in the middle, and on the end of a spectrum.<sup>32</sup> His report showed that there is grey area between GLBTQ and straight men. The issue is not black and white. Kelly sites that Kinsey report helped to dispel the myth that straight people are normal and well-adjusted while queer people are sick or deviant.<sup>33</sup>

Kelly notes that Kinsey later expanded his work to include women. One of the products of this is a continuum called the Kinsey Scale. Kelly highlights it in a diagram in her book it ranges from zero to six and starts at zero, which is exclusively heterosexual. Up to three is considered equally heterosexual and homosexual and up to six is considered exclusively homosexual. The scale is designed to show that just as complex as human life is, human sexuality is equally as complex. Kelly makes a point to help youth understand that queerness, questioning or homosexual lifestyle is not wrong or

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<sup>30</sup> Huegel, *GLBTQ*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Huegel, *GLBTQ*, 10-11.

<sup>32</sup> Huegel, *GLBTQ*, 10-11.

<sup>33</sup> Huegel, *GLBTQ*, 11.

the result of a mental disorder.<sup>34</sup> She cites that several national associations say the same thing. For example, the American Counseling Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychiatric Association, the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of Social Workers provide the same message that a homosexual lifestyle is not considered wrong or is a result of a mental disorder.

Kelly cites two researchers that found that youth identify at the age of sixteen however, they notice their first attraction at the age of nine for males and ten for females. The stages of coming to an understanding of orientation for GLBTQ youth is called awakening and it happens in four stages. Kelly highlights these stages for youth in her book as stage-one sensitization, stage two-identity confusion, stage three-identity assumption, and stage-four commitment. Whereas Huegel's book is not exhaustive it is comprehensive and seems to touch upon everything accept human sexual anatomy in the life of teens.

### *Human Development Theories*

When researching theoretical frameworks for talking about changes to our bodies, adolescence and puberty there are a plethora of resources on sex education, adolescent development and helping boys, girls and GLBTQ youth transition through the developmental years. The work of several notable developmental psychologist is in the introductory writing in order to help parents understand the developmental needs and happens during the age of puberty and adolescence. Although these notable psychologists

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<sup>34</sup> Huegel, *GLBTQ*, 16-17.

and sociologist are extensive for the research of this work, the focus will be placed on Sigmund Freud and Erik Ericson.

Sigmund Freud described the stages of developmental as psychosexual stages, which brought about psychosexual development which caused the establishment of healthy, mature heterosexual relations in adulthood.<sup>35</sup> He believed that throughout the human development stages the individual had to have certain needs met and that each stage was met with crisis that must be resolved at each stage. Neil Salkind in his writings on Human Development states that Freuds hypothesis for his study was “that development of an abnormal personality is the result of some as yet unresolved conflict from the individual’s childhood or especially his assertion that such conflicts are rooted in sexuality.”<sup>36</sup> An additional belief was that certain psychological pressures or instinctual drives are inborn in each individual and that they were sources of energy that stimulated individuals to engage in many different types of behavior.<sup>37</sup> Freuds theories are said to be composed of three major components 1) Dynamic or economic which characterizes the human mind as fluid, energized systems 2) Structural or topographical consisting of a system of three separate yet interdependent psychological structures that modulate behavior and 3) Sequential or stage component that stresses the progression from one stage of development to another, focusing on different sensitive bodily zones, developmental task, and psychological conflicts.<sup>38</sup> Freud’s stages of development

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<sup>35</sup> W. Andrew Collins and Norman A. Sprinthall, *Adolescent Psychology: A Developmental View* (New York, NY: Random House Publishing, 1984).

<sup>36</sup> Neil J. Salkind, *An Introduction to Theories of Human Development* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004), 112.

<sup>37</sup> Collins and Sprinthall, *Adolescent Psychology*.

<sup>38</sup> Salkind, *An Introduction to Theories of Human Development*, 114.

included: infancy, toddler, phallic (psychosexual and adolescent). Infancy is characterized by what he called the oral stage. In this stage, the needs of the infant are being met through feeding and sucking and is characterized as the oral stage of psychosexual development.<sup>39</sup> The next stage is the toddler years and they are characterized as the anal stage. In this stage, the child is focused on learning to control unacceptable impulses particularly in potty training. The next stage is the phallic stage and is between the ages of three and six. This stage is characterized as where the individual learns to deal with sexual feelings and to strengthen their identification with male and female sex roles. He believed that the basic groundwork for heterosexual identity was laid by the age of six. After the age of six the psychosexual stage is characterized as the latency stage and to Freud is relatively calm, psychologically, however it is the calm before the storm of the adolescent years. During this stage, the youth is learning about culture and social roles and relationships.

During the years of adolescents for Sigmund Freud the youth experience turbulence, and unpredictability and they become mercurial and tormented.<sup>40</sup> This stage is characterized as the Phallic stage. He characterized them as turbulent because he said that they are marked by the physical changes of puberty, which bring increased sexual desires. For Freud with the increased sexual desires comes the need for an object of their sexuality. For Freud, sexual instincts is the fundamental component in his theories.<sup>41</sup> Before adolescence major relationships were with parents and friends of the same sex,

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<sup>39</sup> Collins and Sprinthall, *Adolescent Psychology*.

<sup>40</sup> Collins and Sprinthall, *Adolescent Psychology*.

<sup>41</sup> Salkind, *An Introduction to Theories of Human Development*, 112.

however, relationships with the same sex were disapproved and thus this stage faces turbulence and torment because of stress that takes place as a result of finding satisfactory focus for the heterosexual feelings.<sup>42</sup> Freud also believed that during this stage not only is the adolescent resolving the need to find satisfactory focus for sexual impulses but that they are also adjusting to the transition of their parents providing for their psychosexual needs to becoming independent of their parents. These years are very turbulent and stressful Freud believed because the:

Youth is going through major social transitions in which he/she must learn to bring everything under control by developing patterns of coping with the strong sexual feelings of puberty and at the same time learning patterns of behavior that keep family and peers both male and female in proper, socially acceptable balance with each other.<sup>43</sup>

Carol Gillian in her book *In a Different Voice* gives some critique of Freud's theory as it applies to girls. She states that Freud built his theory of psychosexual development around the experiences of the male child that culminated in the "Oedipus complex."<sup>44</sup> She goes further to state "that when trying to fit women into his masculine conception he came to acknowledge in the strength and persistence of women's pre-Oedipal attachments to their mothers a developmental difference."<sup>45</sup> This difference Gilligan notes was considered by Freud to be a failure in women's development because he considered "women to be deprived by nature of the impetus for a clear cut Oedipal

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<sup>42</sup> Collins and Sprinthall, *Adolescent Psychology*.

<sup>43</sup> Collins and Sprinthall, *Adolescent Psychology*, 152.

<sup>44</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>45</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 6-7.

resolution.”<sup>46</sup> He decided that women’s superego which was the heir to the Oedipal complex was compromised because it was never inexorable, is impersonal, is independent of its emotional origins as is required of in men. For Gilligan, this gives the difference between men and woman and should be dully noted and studied.<sup>47</sup> Gilligan unlike Freud believes that the females personality and identity defines itself in relationship and connection with other people more than its connection to the masculine personality.<sup>48</sup>

Erik Erikson is a notable theorist who is also well referenced as it relates to identity development. He is noted as the rebuttal to Sigmund Freud’s psychosexual development. Erikson is still widely used and quoted in regards to child development and specifically adolescent development. Sex education courses are designed with his theories of development as a guise. Erikson’s theory of development is considered epigenesis because as Freud’s also does, it follows a grounded plan.<sup>49</sup> In Erikson’s theory he sees the stages of development as certain bipolar dimensions, which caused crisis that needed to be resolved at each stage and this resolve would determine the process of healthy growth. Erickson believed that “maturational processes might be the impetus for the onset of different stages, but societal demands, which are present from conception through death are as powerful, mediating and shaping forces.”<sup>50</sup> Salkind notes Erikson’s theory as addressing development across the enlivened life span making him the first true

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<sup>46</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Collins and Sprinthall, *Adolescent Psychology*.

<sup>50</sup> Salkind, *An Introduction to Theories of Human Development*, 140-141.

“life span developmental psychologist.” He says that Erickson believed that psychological development results from “the interaction between maturational processes or biological needs and the societal demands and social forces encountered in everyday life.”<sup>51</sup> Michael Green in his writings on the comparison of human development theories states that Erikson’s life span casting does not just concentrate on childhood and adolescence.<sup>52</sup>

The first struggle is trust versus mistrust. This trust versus mistrust starts in the years of infancy when a child is ready to form trusting attitudes. These attitudes are based on their experience with their care-givers. The years of two and three are characterized as the years of later forms of hope and autonomy versus shame. The years of four to six are characterized as will initiative versus guilt. The years of six to twelve are characterized by purpose in mastery versus inferiority. Thirteen to eighteen are considered as competence in identity versus diffusion. Eighteen to the college years are characterized by identity moratorium and achievement versus continued diffusion. Lastly in his stages are the young adult years, which are characterized by intimacy versus isolation.<sup>53</sup>

Erikson specifically believed that the years of adolescence are very important for identity formation. Identity formation is considered “the process of integrating these personal changes, societal demands and expectations for the future.”<sup>54</sup> During this process two things are supposed to happen for the youth and they are a sense of sameness

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<sup>51</sup> Salkind, *An Introduction to Theories of Human Development*, 140.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Green, *Theories of Human Development: A Comparative Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 68.

<sup>53</sup> Collins and Sprinthall, *Adolescent Psychology*.

<sup>54</sup> Collins and Sprinthall, *Adolescent Psychology*, 153.

and unity of personality and the recognition of such unity by adults. He believed that it is these years that a youth gains a solid identity from how they see themselves and also from how others see them. He prescribed that it is during these years that a solid identity must be established and that if it is not it will result in what he called identity diffusion. Identity diffusion is when the stable core of a person's identity has not been established and the person is wondering trying to connect the pieces of history, future and self.<sup>55</sup>

Erikson said that if identity formation is achieved the person avoids diffusion and reaches resolution in fidelity. Fidelity is defined as a high level of trust of self and others and the willingness to commit oneself to a cause.<sup>56</sup> This cause includes care of others and ethical values of respect and cherishing others. Not achieving fidelity could mean early young adult years filled with difference or allegiance which is a lack of trust in oneself and others and inability to care for others as well as the allegiance to causes that are not ethically favorable.<sup>57</sup>

John Longres in the textbook *Human Behavior in the Social Environment* characterizes for students the years of adolescents and Erikson's influence is very evident. He states that adolescence is plagued with psychosocial crises and tasks involving both physical and sexual maturation and by status and role expectations.<sup>58</sup> The period of adolescence is marked by struggles with self-esteem and identity. The types of

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<sup>55</sup> Collins and Sprinthall, *Adolescent Psychology*, 152.

<sup>56</sup> Collins and Sprinthall, *Adolescent Psychology*.

<sup>57</sup> Collins and Sprinthall, *Adolescent Psychology*.

<sup>58</sup> John F. Longres, *Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Itasca, NY: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 2000).

identity in crisis with adolescents include identification with others in a racial or ethnic group, gender roles, and sexual orientation.

It is the belief of sociologist that “resolution of these recurring tasks in the life cycle is initiated as the child experiences the biological, cognitive, social and psychological changes of puberty.”<sup>59</sup> During these years adolescences are either accepting the roles and values that they see as alien to themselves or they are rejecting them causing the crisis of identity to not be resolved and causing identity confusion.<sup>60</sup> Self-esteem is also one of the factors that also fuels the acceptance or rejection of roles and values alien to oneself. A study done in 1990 by the American Association of University Woman found that at the age of nine a majority of girls are confident assertive, and feel positive about themselves, but by the time they reach high school fewer than a third feel that way.<sup>61</sup> Self-esteem was coined by a California task force as “Appreciating my own worth and importance and having the character to be accountable for myself and to act responsibly toward others.”<sup>62</sup>

Allison Gopnik in *The Gardener and the Carpenter: What the New Science of Child Development tells us about the Relationship Between Parents and Children* characterizes the years of adolescence as years of innovation and change in which the agenda is no longer exploring the world in the safe context of a protected childhood and instead are years where the adolescent is leaving the protected context and going to make

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<sup>59</sup> Longres, *Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 497.

<sup>60</sup> Longres, *Human Behavior in the Social Environment*.

<sup>61</sup> Longres, *Human Behavior in the Social Environment*.

<sup>62</sup> Longres, *Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 498.

things happen for themselves.<sup>63</sup> She goes further to highlight that adolescence is plagued by two distinct neural and psychological systems that interact to turn children into adults. The first one is dealing with the emotional and motivation aspects of a child. It is closely linked to the biological and chemical changes of puberty and involves the area of the brain that responds to rewards. It is what turns ten year old's into "intense teenagers, desperate to attain every goal, fulfill every desire and experience every sensation and includes risk taking with drugs, accidents, crime and suicide."<sup>64</sup>

The second neural system involves control and it "channels and harnesses all that soothes energy."<sup>65</sup> This part of the neural system inhibits impulses and guides decision making that encourages long term planning and delays gratification.<sup>66</sup> The second system stated by Gopnik, depends much more on learning and it becomes increasingly effective throughout middle school and continues to develop during adolescence and adulthood as the youth gains more experience.<sup>67</sup>

The understanding of the years of adolescence are characterized as such turbulence and crisis, young people should not traverse it alone without people who understand what they are going through and definitively without the presence of the all-knowing and defining God. The years of adolescence for psychologists and sociologists are the beginning of the time of maturity of the total person. So much is happening all at

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<sup>63</sup> Allison Gopnik, *The Gardner and the Carpenter: What the New Science of Child Development Tells Us About the Relationship Between Parents and Children* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016), 202.

<sup>64</sup> Gopnik, *The Gardner and the Carpenter*, 203.

<sup>65</sup> Gopnik, *The Gardner and the Carpenter*, 204

<sup>66</sup> Gopnik, *The Gardner and the Carpenter*, 204.

<sup>67</sup> Gopnik, *The Gardner and the Carpenter*, 204.

once in the body, mind, and environment of youth. One way that counselors work with youth that may be beneficial to youth navigating human development and the years of puberty is psychoeducational groups. Psychoeducational groups are primarily educational groups that emphasize skills training and can also contribute to group counseling and therapy and for group psychotherapy, they are also groups where the primary focus is education about a psychological concept or topic.<sup>68</sup> Nina Brown in her writings on Psychoeducational Groups notes that these types of groups call for the group leader to guide participants through personal learning; show participants how to interact to reduce isolation and to help each other; provide an opportunity for emotional expression in a safe place, and capitalizing on fostering a development of hope among other positive experiences.<sup>69</sup> The goals of psychoeducational groups according to Nina Brown when quoting the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development is:

Become a valued member in a constructive group; learn how to form and maintain long term and satisfying relationships; develop a sense of self-worth; learn a process for making appropriate choices; begin to tap into available support systems; find ways to access constructive curiosity and exploratory behavior; become altruistic and believe in a promising future.<sup>70</sup>

Marianne Schneider Corey and Gerald Corey highlights that “guidance and psychoeducational groups goal is education and prevention.”<sup>71</sup> Psychoeducational groups can be offered at the prescribed duration of two to three hours to accommodate the slightly extended attention time span of adolescents. They can also accommodate large or

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<sup>68</sup> Nina W. Brown, *Psychoeducational Groups: Process and Practice* (New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), 5-6.

<sup>69</sup> Brown, *Psychoeducational Groups: Process and Practice*, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Brown, *Psychoeducational Groups: Process and Practice*, 177.

<sup>71</sup> Corey Schneider, Marianne Corey, and Gerald Corey, *Groups: Process and Practice* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks Cole Publishing Company, 1997), 9.

small groups. The recommended group size for talking with youth about human development is five to seven members with a helper for every two to three small groups.<sup>72</sup>

In conclusion talking about changes to our bodies as it relates to puberty, and adolescence is a very important conversation that needs to happen not only in the schools but also in the church. The church should be part of the conversation on identity formation and in helping young people navigate the complex terrain of sexual development and maturation. Traditionally and historically the church has led the conversation on sex and sexuality and identity. Its leading has been interpreted as rigid, punitive and non-inclusive of other understandings and the human experience. The Bible is the absolute authority to teachings on human sexuality; however, it must be considerate of social and psychological sciences and their research over the years and how it is influencing the culture.

Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson have been the driving interpretation in the study of human development and identity formation and it serves as the authority and foundation to the understanding of human growth and development for preparation for successful life. It does not however, take into account relationship with God and helping young people to receive all that God has for them.

The focus of and purpose of sex education has changed over the years. Sex education was started in order to teach moral development and to prevent young people from taking on a life of immorality, which is against the precepts of the Bible. Sex education then changed based on the sexual revolution of society and its openness

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<sup>72</sup> Brown, *Psychoeducational Groups: Process and Practice*, 182.

beyond the teachings of the Bible and in accordance to research done by sociologist, psychologist and theorist. Sex education then was based on prescribed natural human development as described by the theorist of the day. Their understanding of the human body involved mental and physical development and how it can achieve successful human development including both a good moral compass that commits to values of respecting and helping other people.

Sex education has shifted from the responsibility of the church to that of the parents to a collaboration of parents, churches and schools, community youth programs. It has expanded to include helping young people navigate every aspect of human life and development including understanding homosexual feelings and its implications for young people as they navigate the years of puberty and adolescence.

Resources for working with young people in the area of navigating the years of puberty and adolescence are vast both for the heterosexual and homosexual youth. It would be of benefit to have an updated curriculum as a resource for talking with young people about puberty, adolescence, sexuality and identity from a Bible based world-view. The church cannot just tell youth to not have sex and adults to not commit adultery. The church has not helped them understand the human passions they will have to manage. Also, the church cannot talk about the increasing prevalence of risky sexual behaviors among youth and all of the underlying issues. The church has not sat with the youth and established a relationship, listened, accepted and taught the truth about their bodies, hormones, emotions and life. Both the church curricula and the school and community curricula could take information from each other in order to be able to properly support young people as they navigate through the years of adolescence and preparation for

adulthood. This also couples with considerations from the leading theorist old and new and their studies on human development will be very beneficial.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PROJECT ANALYSIS

The church's lack of talking to girls about puberty and the natural biological changes happening in their bodies during the developmental stages result in girls experiencing the hormonal changes without guidance or a comfortable place to ask questions and get the truth about the transformation happening in their bodies. Girls are not learning that these changes are natural and normal. These changes do not make them feel comfortable, or okay, but uncomfortable, strange and different from their female peers. When dealing with these changes along with the prevailing cultural views of women, the plurality in gender and relationships they are exposed to in the culture girls are finding themselves in a delicate and fragile state. This state has resulted in girls not defining themselves as beautiful, wonderfully and uniquely made for God's purpose, or as a temple worth treasuring and preserving. In some instances, girls are questioning whether they really are girls at all. They do not feel safe to grow and develop with their bodies and they do not feel comfortable asking questions or talking about what they are experiencing, especially if it is different than other girls.

As described in the historical foundations chapter, women have been categorized as carnal and thus not able to be pleasing to God or connected to God without a denouncement of femininity. We also find that girls and women are made to feel like they are the problem because of the natural ways in which the male and the female body

respond to attraction. Too often girls are made to feel as if they are the problem and that they are the reason the male body responds the way it responds and they are responsible for managing the male body.

The church should be the place where girls learn about developmental changes. The years of puberty and adolescence consist of mental, physical and psychological changes that need explanation and understanding. Church is the place where girls are being taught about God, his creation of mankind including his reasons and purpose for their creation. Providing a consistent opportunity for girls ages ten to thirteen to learn about, and discuss adolescence, puberty and changes happening in their bodies in an environment where truth is spoken with love from a biblical worldview is important. This will allow girls to learn that they are made by God - wonderfully and beautifully. They are temples of the Holy Spirit purposed by him to do phenomenal work in the earth. They will also learn how to safely and appropriately navigate through the developmental years in order to make productive and appropriate life decisions.

In the life of Mt. Ararat Baptist Church teen pregnancy, youth engaging in risky sexual behaviors, identity issues, pornographic addictions, and many other issues were present. The project addressed these concerns. Girls had questions about the changes happening in their bodies and the church is one place that knows what God says about mankind; they are unfortunately not always meeting the need. The church knows who and what they are as defined by God. In the church, we do not openly discuss or share what God says to our younger generation so that they understand and are guided in accordance with a biblical worldview. Regularly addressing the years of puberty with young people can help prepare and equip them with tools to deal with the issues so that

they are not repeating the negative behaviors of past generations. The project's hypothesis is that by providing a ministry to help girls learn, discuss and process puberty, adolescence, and the biological changes happening in their bodies will provide assistance in dealing with the changes occurring in their bodies as they experience the developmental years of puberty thus making an impact on their lives.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the project is to explore the impact of providing an environment for girls ages ten to thirteen to learn, discuss and process puberty, adolescence and changes in their bodies. Impact would be measured by increased knowledge and awareness. A qualitative case study was conducted to explore the impact providing an environment for girls ages ten to thirteen to learn, discuss, and process puberty, adolescence and changes in their bodies. By providing an environment to help girls learn, discuss and process puberty, adolescence and the biological changes will help them to embrace scriptures that indicate they are wonderfully and beautifully made. Further, it will assist them in knowing that God made them with a purpose, that they are temples of the Holy Spirit and that they will learn about the female body and the biological changes that occur during puberty and help them maintain healthy hygiene techniques for care of the body.

### **Methodology**

Mt. Ararat Baptist Church provided an environment for six sessions where girls ages ten to thirteen were invited to come and interact with other girls in this age range in

a group session. The first couple of sessions started with one or two fun get to know games that fostered the building of relationship amongst the girls and the session leaders. Each session was designed to have a human development lesson and a biblical lesson then a fun art project to bring the concepts together. The fun art project was also implemented so that the sessions were not just lectures without creativeness or fun. Each session ended with the journal question “What was one thing you learned today?” which each participant completed and turned into the researcher.

The research methodology was the use of the triangulation method using a pre-post survey, discussion question, participant journal and session journal along with a post meeting with the participants to discuss their answers and results. Using this method ensures that the researcher satisfies, validity, confirmability, and transferability. A pre-survey was given at the beginning of the first session and a post survey was administered at the end of the last session. A session evaluation was also administered at the end of the last session where the girls evaluated the sessions, and the session leader. The project researcher also kept a journal of the sessions to ensure an accurate account of the sessions.

The group session format was chosen in order to create an environment that was friendly, comfortable and not overwhelming for girls ages ten to thirteen to discuss human development. I also chose a small group setting because the recommended group size for talking with youth about human development is five to seven members with a helper for every two to three small groups.<sup>1</sup> When the group size gets too large it eliminates the ability of every participant to participate and interact with each other.

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, *Psychoeducational Groups: Process and Form*, 182.

Having a learning environment conducive for this project was very important especially for the short amount of time allotted for the project implementation.

Each of the sessions was led by one of the five context associates that were chosen to work with me. Each context associate was a member of the church and each either works in the youth ministry of the church or with young people professionally. Since this was the profession for the context associates they were already familiar with interaction with young people.

### *Session One*

Session one of the girls group started with a fifteen-minute parent meeting prior to meeting with the girls. The purpose of the parent meeting was to inform the parents of the group structure and how the information gathered from their daughters would be handled. It was an opportunity for the parents and the girls to meet the facilitators of the group sessions. During the meeting, each facilitator was introduced by name and job title, which was an indication to the parents that all of the facilitators were employed in fields (counseling, social work, higher education and working with children) that required criminal clearances. This approach served to inform the parents and build their trust and also to help in building trust and relationship with each of the girls. Building trust and rapport with the parents and the participants was essential to interacting on the topic of physical development.

Also, the parents were introduced to the structure of each session and how data would be collected, stored, utilized and kept confidential. Each parent and participant was informed that they would remain anonymous. Only the researcher would know their

identity and that the researcher would be the one to administer every survey and questionnaire used for data collection. Each participant was assigned an identification number, which they used to sign their name on every tool that was administered. The participants were informed that shared information would not be repeated to any parent or guardian by the facilitators, but that if the participants choose to share the discussions with their parents that was admissible. This served as a way to guarantee confidentiality and to help the girls become comfortable that these sessions belonged to them and they were free to share.

The curriculum resource materials were presented to the parents for information purposes to identify the content that would be shared with the children. The parents were informed that at any session they could ask to review the materials and ask questions. To close the meeting each parent was given the time breakdown of each session and reminded of the six scheduled session dates and times.

Session one started with the girls enjoying pizza, chips and a beverage. After the girls finished their dinner the first data tool was administered, the pre-survey. After all of the girls completed their survey they were led in an icebreaker game to help them get to know each other along with the facilitators and work to build a cohesive group with comfort in talking, learning and sharing with each other.

After the icebreaker game, the researcher and facilitators talked with the girls about the purpose of the sessions. The girls were led in a scripture reading on the creation story found in Genesis 1-2:25. The researcher and facilitators highlighted how God made the earth and its vegetation and animals and how he made them all to multiply upon the earth bringing forth its own kind and how he called it good. It was discussed

how God created male and female in his own image and just as he created the vegetation and the animals to multiple upon the earth he created man to do the same, only he called his creation of them “very good.”

The purpose of reading the Genesis creation story to the girls was to begin to show them the great care that God took in making everything on earth especially man both male and female and the purpose that he had for both. It was expressed to the girls that God took great care to make man in his own image and likeness and after He created them he looked at them and said to himself, I did a great job, this is very good or I outdid myself.

During the discussion, the girls read along with the facilitators and researcher and had opportunities to pull out the information from the scripture and recite and regurgitate what was read to them as the scripture revealed the happenings of the creation story. Each girl was asked to remember that God put his best into creating them and to remember when they do not feel as smart, or as pretty or as worthy as other girls or people to remember that God looked at his creation and said that he outdid himself when he created them. At the end of the session each girl was asked to write on paper one thing that they learned in the session.

### *Session Two*

Session two’s topic was Health and Hygiene and Psalm 139:13-14 was the foundational scripture. This session started with one of the facilitators working with the girls doing an icebreaker where they cut out pictures from several magazines that depicted positive attributes of women. Before the girls posted their picture on the wall

they had to tell the facilitator what was positive about the picture. The ice breaker served to create further group cohesion but also to get the girls thinking about how women are beautiful, unique and that they have positive characteristics. After completing this icebreaker the girls engaged in another ice breaker that served to help the girls continue to build relationship through fun with the other girls. This icebreaker was my form of scattergories in which the girls could work alone, or in groups of two and come up with as many items in a chosen category as they could before time was called. Once time was called, the girls received points for any item that was also on the facilitator's card. This game appeared to be received well by the girls and as they played the game it was observed that each girl was becoming more comfortable with being in the group and working with others in the group.

After the icebreaker activities, the girls engaged in a discussion on what it means to take care of themselves or practicing a hygiene routine each morning and freshening up throughout the day. Each girl was given pointers for taking care of their bodies each morning before school, during school, especially after classes such as gym and sports and also when they get home from school.

After the discussion on hygiene the researcher recapped the previous session on the Genesis creation story and introduced Psalm 139:13-14 and talked about how strategic God was when he made each of us and how it is okay to celebrate that uniqueness. The girls were led in a craft activity. Each girl made a fingerprint of uniqueness in which she examined her thumb fingerprint and duplicated it to the best of her ability on a piece of white copy paper. The girls then wrote along the lines of her fingerprint indicating her uniqueness. They reflected on things that she liked about

herself, and things she was good at. Each girl was instructed to take her fingerprint home and hang it up in her mirror or on her door and every time she looks at it to remember that God had her wonderfully and uniquely. This exercise served to drive home how it is okay to celebrate how God formed each part of us and took great care in making us. After completing their art project, the participants were asked to write down one thing they learned in the session for that day.

### *Session Three*

The topic of session three was Health and Hygiene continued with a discussion on what products are to be used to aid in the hygiene routine. The girls viewed the Dove Self-Esteem video on puberty and girls. After enjoying their dinner and an icebreaker game that was described as fun, the girls traveled to the church's computer lab and viewed the video, which walked the girls through the years of change characterized by puberty. The video was illustrated using young girls with their facial expressions and attitudes about the information. This video served as a help to the facilitators in covering pertinent aspects of puberty and what it entails to give them a picture of what to expect. It also helped to cover areas that we may not be able to cover because of the time constraints in the project implementation.

After viewing the video, the girls were led in discussion and learning on the specific parts of the female body that have major changes and require more attention to hygiene. First the facilitator asked what they learned from the video and the girls mentioned some of the things that they did not know. One of the responses was: They then began to talk about the areas that change requiring a need for hygiene routine. These

areas included the underarms, sweat glands, hair growth, menstrual cycle, and the private area. Each girl was asked what they knew about puberty and the changes that occur. The girls mentioned things such as sweating, breast development, and hair growth. The girls showed some discomfort in talking about the female private area and when asked what it was called they got quiet and appeared nervous.

After their discussion on a hygiene routine the girls engaged in an art project that was designed to enforce the point of the need to care for their bodies throughout life.

After the hygiene discussion, the group reviewed Psalm 139:13-14 and First Corinthians 6:19 and discussed the great care that God took in creating humanity and how wonderfully and exceptionally He formed man in the mother's wombs and specifically made us. Therefore, it is imperative that we take care of ourselves because we are temples for the presence of the Holy Spirit. The point was stressed that at the hour of accepting and believing in Christ, the Holy Spirit came into our hearts and resides and that we must take care of our bodies because it is the house of God. The need of a hygiene routine and celebration of the body and acknowledgment of our uniqueness was demonstrated by having the girls plant poppy seeds in small flower pots with soil. They decorated the pots and took them home to care for them as a reminder of the importance of taking care of their bodies. The facilitators discussed that just as we take care to water our flower pots to make sure that our flowers can grow and blossom we must make sure that we take care of our bodies because of all of the changes. After planting their seeds each girl was then given the opportunity to write down one thing that they learned during session three.

*Session Four*

The topic of the fourth session was on the changes in the body and all of its sensations and new feelings. The session started with the girls enjoying their provided snack and then we transitioned into discussion on what was going on in the body. During this discussion, the girls discussed the new and different sensations, feelings emotions, the menstrual cycle that occur in the body as the female reproductive system matured. The discussion started by the facilitator asking the girls what kind of changes had they heard about that takes place in the body during puberty. The girls were asked to remember what they learned from the puberty video. The girls answered breasts and hair and getting taller and mood swings. The facilitator used those things mentioned to talk about the different changes using a diagram that gave a picture of the progression of body change in the hips and breasts. She showed the girls a diagram of the female's progression in breast development and hair growth around the female private area. It was stressed that girls grow and develop at different rates and that not all girls look the same. It was stressed that the uniqueness was acceptable because that was intentional when God designed each of us. As the facilitator showed each diagram she asked the girls if they understood. In some instances when showing the diagram, the girls had questions. The last diagram was that of the female private area and the female reproductive organ. Each part of the female private area was discussed and highlighted in order for the girls to understand the new importance of a hygiene routine. The female private area is a very delicate area and requires delicate, yet thorough and consistent care.

The discussion was very rich with information that the girls seemed to enjoy as shown by the increased amount of questions placed in the question box. The girls

laughed and encouraged each other to ask the questions. During the discussion of the female private area and reproductive organ questions such as "how does hair grow on the vagina?" "How do you have a baby?" Can you tell us the process of how your water breaks?" The session was full of energy and giggles and excited learning from the girls. The facilitators were excited that the girls displayed such cohesiveness and comfort in having the discussion as a group that resulted in questions and the sharing of information.

After the discussion, the girls were shown examples of different female products that are safe to use for their hygiene routine. The demonstration was complete with instructions such as only wash your hair every two weeks and making sure that you rinse soap and shampoo completely off of the body. Some of the products they were shown included antiperspirant deodorant, panty liners, soap, shampoo, conditioner, hair oil, lip balm, and other items. The facilitators were careful to stress that items such as razors and tampons need parent discussion and approval before use and that we were not giving instructions on the use of those items for that reason, but that those tools are also used for the care of the body.

After the discussion, the researcher led a lesson emphasizing again Psalm 139:13-14 and First Corinthians 6:19 talking about the great care that God took in creating us and how wonderfully and exceptionally He formed us in our mother's wombs. She talked about how we must take care of ourselves because we are temples for the presence of the Holy Spirit and that God dwells in us helping us to live doing the right things everyday because we believe in him. She recapped what was talked about during the changes in our bodies lesson and focused a little on the mood swings and the different rates of growth experienced by each girl during puberty. The facilitator talked about how it was

important that each girl safeguards against depression and feelings of difference that will be experienced. The girls were led in a project of making acrostic poems using the letters of their name. Each girl was instructed to choose either her first, last, middle, or a positive nickname to use and then to select a positive word that described them that started with the first letter of each of their name. The purpose of this exercise was to help the girls continue the exercise that they learned in session two where they identified things that they liked about themselves and positive unique things about themselves that they identify for themselves. These items served as positive self-affirmations that are helpful for equipping the girls with tools to turn around negativity and mood swings. The self-affirmation will also help the girls to be positive when they begin to feel like they are different from other girls as their bodies began to develop and mature. After the girls worked on their acrostic poems, they were prompted to complete their question of what they learned new during session.

### *Session Five*

The topic of session five was the female reproductive system. The girls began the session by enjoying dinner of pizza, chips and soda. After dinner, the facilitator talked with the girls about the female reproductive system, its parts and functions and its location in the female body. The facilitator utilized diagrams that showed the inside of the uterus and the action it performed. The facilitator gave step-by-step of the monthly process of menstruation including helping the girls understand that the entire process works in a twenty-eight-day time frame. The facilitator explained the process a woman goes through when pregnant and delivery including where the baby really grows in the

female body. The girls listened intently as the facilitator talked about and stressed the major responsibility of knowing the female body, all of its parts and functions, feelings and sensations before deciding to connect with the male body.

The male body was discussed in part because a question was asked, "what is sex" by one of the girls. We stressed the importance of asking any and all questions without feeling uncomfortable. The girls were encouraged to ask any questions about the female body, the male body, sex or anything else. Due to time constraints and the massive information that needed to be covered about the female body, the male body was not diagrammed or discussed unless there was a question or it needed to be referenced in regard to the female body. Other questions also came as a result of this discussion of the female body and they included: "Why does the doctor stick two fingers into the vagina?" and "how do you have a baby?"

After the discussion on the female reproductive organs, a discussion occurred on First Corinthians 6:19 and it was stressed again about the importance of realizing and recognizing that our bodies are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The facilitator also discussed the importance of believing in Jesus Christ and confessing with our mouths our belief in Jesus and that he died for our sins in order to become the temple of the Holy Spirit's presence. The facilitator shared her story of coming to Christ at a young age and the difference that it made in her life. She recapped the purpose of the groups and how it all tied in with the fact that God made them wonderfully and unique and that He made them to be beautiful temples for his presence and for his purpose. After having the talk, the opportunity was provided for the girls to accept Christ into their hearts if they had not already done so. Each of the girls expressed that they had already accepted Jesus as their

Savior. The final art project of flower pens was implemented. Before giving instructions for making the flower pens, each point was reinforced from all of the sessions. The girls were informed that they were making the pens so that they would be reminded that they are wonderfully and uniquely made by God for his purpose and that they do not have to look like other people, or act like other people and that they have the power and presence of God on the inside of them. The facilitator stressed that they were made on purpose and that God was very happy and pleased with his creation and that he made them just as he wanted them to be, eyes, nose, hairline, curves, small, petite, tall, etc.

### *Session Six*

In session six the group of young ladies completed their post surveys and evaluation of what they thought of the sessions including the facilitators, the space, the topics and activities. The researcher and facilitators hosted a celebration with food for the girls and their parents. During the opening remarks, the facilitator encouraged the participants to continue to learn about their bodies, get their education and follow their dreams with the leading of God and the Holy Spirit that indwells inside of them. At the celebration, the young ladies were presented with certificates and a hygiene bag as a gift that included hygiene routine items that they learned about to continue their daily hygiene routines in body care. The girls were given items such as toothbrush, toothpaste, lip balm, shampoo, conditioner, menstrual products, comb, and a mirror. Each of the facilitators received words of appreciation and gratitude for their active engagement in the research project. While doing so, the parents expressed their gratitude as well. They indicated that the project provided a platform to help them have the needed conversation

of physical development and God with their daughters. Some of the mothers went further to say that not only should the conversation take place with youth but also with adults because it was not a traditional process, but a necessary process.

### **Summary of Learning**

Youth desire for adults to take time to teach them, allow them to ask questions and interact in an environment where they do not have to feel ashamed, scared, nervous or afraid to ask whatever they want.

The pre-post survey was arranged in three parts:

- 1) What I believe
- 2) What is important to me
- 3) What I know

It was designed to capture if the girls already had knowledge of what God says about them in the Bible; what importance they placed on taking care of their bodies and what type of knowledge they possessed on the female reproductive system. During the sessions, the girls were taught about their bodies and the major changes physically, emotionally and mentally that was occurring as they moved into the puberty stage of human growth and development. They were presented with tools of how to properly care for their changing bodies. Knowing how they felt about approaching these changes was valuable in order to see if that knowledge was already present and if not present did the girls become aware.

The first section looked at what the girls believed. This section identified the girls' knowledge of what God says about them. It asked the participants to say what they

believed about themselves as it relates to God's creation of them. In this section such questions were addressed as: "I believe that I am a unique creation by God" and "My body is a temple and I should take care of my body"

### *What I Believe*

Table 1. Pre-survey scores: "What I believe"

Question	P001	P002	P003	P004	Score
Q1	3	3	3	3	12
Q2	2	3	3	2	10
Q3	2	3	3	4	12
Q4	2	3	3	2	10
Q5	2	3	3	3	11
Q6	3	3	4	3	13
Score	14	24	19	17	

Table 2. Post-survey scores: "What I believe"

Question	P001	P002	P003	P004	Score
Q1	3	3	3	3	12
Q2	3	3	3	2	11
Q3	3	3	3	2	11
Q4	3	3	3	3	12
Q5	3	3	3	4	13
Q6	3	3	3	3	12
Score	24	24	24	17	

Table 3. Post-survey statistics: "What I believe"

What I believe!	Average Score By Question	Change Over Pretest
I believe that I am a unique creation by God	3	0
I believe my body is where God lives, it is His temple	2.75	0.25
Reading the Bible tells me what God says about me	2.75	-0.25
I believe I was created by God for a reason	3	0.5
Believing that I am beautiful is being thankful to God for how he made me	3.25	0.5
My body is a temple and I should take great care of my body	3	-0.25

Table 3 shows the comparison of each participant's answers from the pre to the post-survey and the average score chosen with a variance between the two. In this section, the researcher sought to understand what the girls already believed and if the belief was present at the start of the sessions. If not, she wanted to find out if the girls changed and acquired that belief at the end of the sessions? What this data showed was that overall at the beginning of the sessions the participants already had a belief of what God says about them. For example, with question one all four participants answered "Always" on both the pre and post-surveys with the remaining five questions answered "Always." This seemed to signify that knowledge was already present.

Also, significant note, a very slight indication was given that there was a knowledge increase in the specifics of what God says about them when two of the four participants gave a change in answers to questions in this section. Participant 004 answered "do not understand" in the pre-survey and answered "sometimes" in the post survey for question four where the other three participants answered that same question with answers of "Always" either on both the pre and post or moving to that answer on the post. We also see this same type of occurrence on question six where participant 003 moved from "Do not understand" to "Always" when participants 001, 002, and 004 answered "Always" for both the pre and the post surveys.

*What Is Important to Me*

Table 4. Pre-survey scores: “What is important to me”

Question	P001	P002	P003	P004	Score
Q1	4	4	4	3	15
Q2	4	4	4	4	16
Q3	4	4	3	2	13
Q4	2	1	2	4	9
Q5	4	4	4	3	15
Score	18	17	17	16	

Table 5. Post-survey scores: “What is important to me”

Question	P001	P002	P003	P004	Score
Q1	4	3	4	3	14
Q2	4	4	4	4	16
Q3	4	4	4	3	15
Q4	3	1	4	3	11
Q5	4	4	4	4	16
Score	19	16	20	17	

Table 6. Post-survey statistics: “What is important to me”

What is important to me!	Average Score By Question	Change Over Pretest
Brushing my teeth and tongue in the morning, after every meal and before bed is...	3.5	-0.25
Showering or washing up in the morning and at night is...	4	0
Checking to make sure that I am clean is good hygiene practice is...	3.75	0.5
Talking about the changes to my body with my parents or a caring adult is...	2.75	0.5
Knowing how to care for my body is...	4	0.25

In this section, the goal was to capture the level of importance the participants placed on taking care of their bodies via hygiene habits. Most young people when arriving at the age of puberty tend to shy away from taking time to care for their bodies. The girls in this project were taught that because of the changes occurring in the body just getting in the shower or tub and running water over themselves is no longer enough and that work had to be put in to practice self-care. It was also important to reassure the girl

that taking care of the body was okay and not act of pornography. Most of the girls made faces like it was inappropriate to take specific care of the body including the private area.

What the researcher found when assessing this area is that overall the girls considered it important to take care of their bodies by way of a hygiene routine ranging from medium importance to high importance. In example on question two “Showering or washing up in the morning and at night is...” all of the participants answered “high importance” on both the pre and post survey. On questions three and five we see that the participants kept this level of importance but also ascribed greater importance to hygiene by their scores being high across both surveys and by the movement of at least two participants from medium to high importance from the pre to the post survey.

Question number four in this section specifically touched upon not only the importance the participants had on taking personal care of their bodies but in talking with a parent or caring adult about the care of the body. This question resulted in both a significant increase in the importance but also showed that at least two of the participants were figuring out what they felt about the content and their comfort in talking about it with an adult. Two of the participants answered “Low” on the pre-survey meaning they did not see an importance in talking with an adult and answered either “High” or “Medium” on the post-survey. One participant answered “not important on both the pre and post survey,” which is possibly an indication that she is not comfortable talking with her parent or that she does not need to. One participant answered “High” on the pre-survey and “Medium” on the post-survey decreasing on feelings of importance slightly possibly indicating her level of comfort with the topic and talking with an adult.

*What I Know*

Table 7. Pre-survey scores: “What I know”

Question	P001	P002	P003	P004	Score
Q1	3	3	1	4	11
Q2	3	4	4	4	15
Q3	2	4	3	3	12
Q4	1	4	1	4	10
Q5	2	3	1	3	9
Q6	1	2	1	3	6
Q7	2	4	4	4	14
Score	14	23	15	25	

Table 8. Post-survey scores: “What I know”

Question	P001	P002	P003	P004	Score
Q1	4	4	3	4	15
Q2	4	4	4	4	16
Q3	4	4	4	3	15
Q4	4	3	4	4	15
Q5	4	2	4	4	14
Q6	4	3	4	3	14
Q7	3	4	4	2	13
Score	27	25	27	24	

Table 9. Post-survey statistics: “What I know”

What I know!	Average Score By Question	Change Over Pretest
I know that girls grow and develop at different rates	3.75	1
I know that having a daily bathing routine is practicing good hygiene	4	0.25
I know that using antiperspirant deodorant helps with sweating	3.75	0.75
I know that the female reproductive system is called a uterus	3.75	1.25
I know that pregnancy is the result of having sex	3.5	1.25
I know that the female private area is made up of the clitoris, urethra and the vagina	3.5	1.75
Being able to say positive things about myself is important	3.25	-0.25

In this section, the goal was to assess what the girls already knew about their reproductive systems and whether or not that knowledge was increased. When assessing the girls, it was found that the girls did come with a slight knowledge base. We see a more positive change from pre to post scores with only one negative (-.25). In talking with the girls during the sessions and after learning that some of the concepts were new to the girls; such as the real name of the female reproductive system and its components. We see the highest rates of change on questions four, five and six with question six receiving the highest rate of change at (1.75). Question six has the new concepts in the question. Upon asking one of the girls why she answered what she answered she stated that she was not familiar with one of the words.

### *Journal Session*

Each participant was administered an open-ended question at the end of each session that was designed to see what the girls retained and what struck their interest. This method was chosen in order to get strength in the belief that the girls would increase knowledge from their participation in the groups. Below is what the girls reported at the end of each session.

Table 10. Journal session results

<b>Session 1</b>
Today I learned the creation of man and woman also about the girls.
I learned more about how GOD made the world because I didn't know much about it.
How God created people and all living things
I learned that Adam was made from the dust off of the ground
<b>Session 2</b>
One thing I learned today was about the sweat glands and that we develop faster than boys
That when you pop your bumps that come then you will get black marks

I learned that the breast that we grown are for feeding the baby that we may have later in our lives. I also learned that our hips grow so that the bone that protects our uterus can expand and grow.

**Session 3**

That we have to wash really good when we get a bath and that we all sweat boys, girls, and baby

I learned that when you have your period, you have it once a month or every twenty-eight days

I learned that most periods are twenty-eight days apart and last for about five days.

**Session 4**

One thing I learned was that girls have discharge

I learned about how you have your period

That your uterus takes turns sending an egg into the uterus

**Session 5**

One thing I learned in the last session is about the female reproductive system

I learned our breast grows

One thing I learned is that you shouldn't shave your private area

It was evident that the groups made an impact on the girls and that they did learned some new concepts and information about their growing and developing bodies that they did not know before the sessions. It also shows that they girls gained a better understanding of the changes in specifics more so than they knew before the sessions. In session one the conversation on the biblical creation story was well received and information was remembered after the conversation.

*Evaluation Session*

Table 11. Evaluation results: Questionnaire

	P001	P002	P003	P004
1. I was comfortable talking with the group leaders	A	A	SA	N
2. The group leaders were nice	SA	SA	SA	SA
3. It felt like the leaders cared about me	SA	SA	SA	A
4. It is okay to talk about your body	N		SA	A
5. Girls my age should talk about this	N	SA	SA	A
6. It is okay to talk about my body at church	N	SA	SA	N
7. This is something girls in church youth group and Sunday school class should talk about	D	SA	SA	N
8. I will participate in the group if offered again	A	SA	SA	SA

9. I have asked Jesus Christ to be my Lord and Savior	SA	SA	SA	SA
10. Friday and Saturday were good days for me to attend the groups	SA	SA	SA	A
11. It was fun to interact with the other girls in the group	A	SA	SA	A
12. I learned what being a Temple of God is	SA	SA	SA	N
13. I was able to ask questions	A	SA	SA	A
14. When I first started attending the groups, I did not feel comfortable talking to people about my body	SA	SA	SA	N
15. The questions that I had were answered	A	SA	SA	SA
16. I felt safe in the groups	SA	SA	SA	A
17. There was something that I wanted to talk about that we did not talk about	SD	SA	SA	D
18. We have a class about this in my school	N	D	SA/N	N
19. I have talked with my parent/guardian about my body	D	SD	SA	SA

SA=Strongly Agree A=Agree N=Neutral D=Disagree SD=Strongly Disagree

Table 12. Evaluation results: Open ended questions

<b>Question #1 What is something that you learned in the group that God says about you?</b>	
P001	God says that humans were very good and that women and I are beautiful
P002	When he made us he said we looked very good!
P003	We were made out of men and we are beautiful
P004	God says that we are very good
<b>Question #2 What was the best part of the groups?</b>	
P001	Interacting with the girls
P002	When we ate food and asked questions about our bodies and also played games.
P003	Food games
P004	We did different activities that represent our bodies
<b>Question #3 Name one thing you DID NOT like about the groups?</b>	
P001	Nothing I liked every thing
P002	I disliked nothing I liked everything.
P003	Nothing
P004	There was not as many girls I thought that there would be.
<b>Question #4 Is there anything else that you would like to share about the group? (Optional)</b>	
P001	No
P002	No
P003	No
P004	No

In the evaluation session, each participant was able to look back on their six session experience and tell the facilitators and the researcher how they felt about the sessions including, what state of mind they came to the sessions with, how they felt as they experienced the sessions, what they learned and how these sessions can be duplicated or adapted for future girls.

We find the beginning of the evaluation resulted in mostly “strongly agree” answers letting us know that across the board the girls had favorable experience in the sessions, that they learned new things, enjoyed their experience, felt okay about the subject matter and enjoyed the adults who facilitated the sessions. We see on such question as fourteen that the girls were not comfortable with the idea of talking with people about their bodies when they came to the sessions with all four participants answering “strongly agree.” Questions four and six indicate that the girls not only felt uncomfortable talking about their bodies when coming to the session but that they also did not have strong thoughts that the subject should be talked about in the church as part of Sunday School or youth group, however, they did feel that the subject matter was important for girls their ages to discuss by their answers on question five.

We also find that the girls enjoyed the facilitators, and that they felt safe while engaging in the sessions. Something that occurred during the sessions help the girls move from being uncomfortable with talking about their bodies to becoming comfortable discussing, learning, and interacting.

The purpose of the open-ended questions on the evaluation was also to give more strength to the session journal questions. There were a couple of sessions where the girls forgot about the session, could not attend because of other obligations around the

Thanksgiving and Holiday season and this helped get an understanding of if the girls really gained knowledge on the subject matter. These questions did not seek to take the place of the journal questions they just gave strength to them. The sessions were facilitated in a manner where the previous week's content was repeated at each session in order that the girls did not miss content.

The evaluation was administered at the very last session number six where this and the post-survey were the only items presented. There was not a lesson or topic covered that day, it was a day of fun and celebration of the girls and their participation in the sessions.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this thesis project it has been expressed that there is a need to help young ladies navigate the years of puberty and adolescence with a biblical world view and the truth about the human developmental years. This need is evidenced by the experiences of women down through the ages from women being labeled as carnal and being restricted in leadership roles in the house of faith, to slavery, post slavery and the view of African American women in the post antebellum south to the push out of girls of color in the public schools. The experience of African American women and women of color has and continues to be that of marginalization, misunderstanding, push out, which gives reason for the need for someone to help girls make sense of the world and who they are in it.

Freud and Erikson have expressed the need for each individual to resolve conflicts at each stage of human development whose resolve results in them being able to deal

with the rest of their life. Our young ladies cannot be left to navigate the most tumultuous years of their life alone relying on the many different views and interpretations and motivations of this culture. They also cannot be left to rely on the perceived knowledge of their peers in this subject area because their peers need help navigating these years as well. There are too many competing views of what constitute maturity, beauty and womanhood, for young ladies to figure it out alone; not to mention all that goes with how to care for the body and why. In many conversations about this project with women they have stated that no one had the conversation about hygiene and how to care for the body when the development changes started. They were expected to figure it out on their own and they felt the void that was left when they did not get the needed support. This does not need to continue to be the scenario for young ladies. The church is definitely that place of love, care and support where young ladies will learn how God loves them and how to love and care for themselves in truth and understanding.

The church is the most vital place where our early pubescent youth should be learning, discussing and processing puberty, adolescence and the changes that are acquiring in their bodies. By having this conversation girls will learn what is happening, why it is happening, and how to properly take care of themselves. Without this opportunity for processing, girls will be forced to navigate alone resulting in them seeking information from less favorable sources and getting the wrong information. Girls benefit from opportunities to learn, ask questions and interact in fun and positive ways with other girls, and in an environment with caring adults.

What we find from the data is that by having sessions for girls in early pubescence to learn, discuss and process the developmental years of puberty and

adolescence, there will be an impact on the girls. The girls will increase in knowledge in the areas of what they believe about what God says about them, their importance on caring for their bodies and what they know about their bodies.

Through this project we learned that girls benefit from learning about what God says about them in his word. Most of the girls in this project came to the group already knowing that God said something about them, however, what stuck out to a couple of them was what he actually said as evidenced by the answers in their journal questions and the open-ended question portion of their session evaluation. The girls loved to hear the positive things that God said about them. Hearing the statement that God created man and woman and said that it was “very good” during the sessions, resulted in smiles from all of the girls each time it was presented to them. Learning that God took great care to create them, nose, eyes, hair, and skin, was rewarding for the girls especially as they begin this developmental period that includes evaluating how they match up with other girls their age. Learning while having fun interacting with other girls was impactful for the girls as well.

During the sessions, the girls learned what it felt like to establish relationships with loving and caring adults other than their parents and talking with them and learning about their bodies in an unembarrassed and bold way. It was evident that one thing that made the girls more comfortable is that the facilitators were not their parents. For example, the girls took to heart when told that the facilitators would not talk about the specifics of anything that they shared unless they expressed harm to self or others. A couple of the mothers mentioned it to the researcher that the girls sort of celebrated that they did not have to talk to their parents. This was something that the researcher did have

to address with the girls in a little more depth only to express that even though they did not have to discuss what they shared during session it is important to talk with their parents about everything that was discussed because the researcher and other adults would not be there as much as their parents will beyond the session. This made an impact on the girls also evidenced by their freedom to ask more and more questions throughout the sessions. The girls were still asking questions at the follow up session held by the researcher to talk with the ladies about the results of the surveys. They wanted to know more about their bodies and also about the bodies of boys. The fact that the young ladies felt comfortable to ask questions as the session continued was a positive outcome because it showed that the girls felt safe, and were able to establish rapport and relationship with the adult facilitators. This is something that is very important as expressed in our theoretical chapter when talking with youth about human development. In order for groups to be effective trust, confidentiality, and respect must be established.

As a result of this established report and trust in the girls, instead of getting responses of ‘eww’ and subsequently shut down from the girls, we saw the girls go from responses of “eww” to asking questions and wanting to talk more and more. This is what is desired in these sessions. This also gives evidence of an impact being made on the girls in the group. This was and should be one of the first goals when establishing a group session with girls. Building rapport, trust, and group cohesion was the first goal of the group. This was established within this group by conducting fun get-to-know activities at the beginning of the first three sessions. This was also established by soliciting the participation of the girls in establishing a list of group expectations that started with pre-written guarantees created by the facilitators guaranteeing the girls confidentiality,

respect and a listening ear. These pre-written guarantees included the guarantee that what was said in the group stayed in the group and that bullying and any mean behavior was not welcomed. For the purposes of this project, the girls were made aware both in the presence of their parents and after the start of the group that information from the interaction in the group would be used for the purpose of this doctoral thesis project and it was explained that their names and any ways that they could be identified would be kept confidential. The girls were assigned numbers that they used on each of their surveys and the researcher was the only one who knew what number belonged to whom. This for the girls gave them needed assurance that this was a group that they could take ownership in and be free to learn and interact.

This doctoral thesis project was an effort to show that there is a need for making these groups available for youth and that having these sessions would have an impact on the girls that would participate. The express purpose of the group was to have the beginning conversation with girls about their bodies in an effort to help them learn about their bodies and how to properly care for them for now and as they grow into independent adults. As Erik Erikson expressed in his human development research having support to resolve the issues during this stage in life of not knowing the form and function of the body can lead to not being equipped for proper decision making as they grow older. The conversation about the function and care of the body has so much relevance for a youth gaining independence in this world. Upon introducing my project to people when asked about my doctoral work, I consistently received the response that so many adults need to have this conversation. So many adults who have made decisions in love relationships, friendships and that they would not have made if someone had had the beginning

conversation about how the body changes and matures during puberty and adolescence.

The conversation has to start at the beginning and not as a catch up. Girls need to know that their bodies will begin to signal and respond and that those signals and response do not require anything but acknowledgment that that is what the body is supposed to do.

Youth will not automatically know this on their own. With the short length of the prescribed implementation period for this project the topic had to be concise and as thorough as possible leaving room for fun and digestion of the information. This required that the conversation be introductory and a stage for future further conversation.

In light of the sessions being introductory in nature and a beginning conversation with girls about how their bodies are changing and developing the topic of LGBTQ was only briefly discussed. During the brief conversation, the group facilitators were honest about the fact that there are some youth who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer. The discussion with the ladies was on the subject of attraction and it was expressed that if one is identifying as LGBTQ that the same type of attraction that a female has for a male is the same type of attraction that one has for the same sex. It was also expressed to the young ladies that God created all and loves all and that is okay to seek out a loving adult including the adults facilitators and their parents to ask questions and to get further understanding of the happenings as the body is growing, developing and maturing. They were also assured that if and when they had any questions, feelings or thoughts that they wanted to discuss that it was welcomed for them to do so both in the group and as a one on one break discussion with one of the facilitators.

Human development as it relates to LGBTQ was not a subject that was concentrated on during the implementation of the project. The focus was on introducing

the girls to what God says about his creation of humankind, how to care for the body.

Learning the reproductive system and managing the psychological and physiological changes that start to occur during puberty. What the researcher and group facilitators did was make an effort to observe throughout the session conversations and interactions if any of the girls were identifying as LGBTQ or seemed uncomfortable while discussing attraction and the other aspects of human development. It is the belief of the researcher that further study, talk with the church pastor on the stance of the church and engaging preparation under the leading of the Holy Spirit is important when making LGBTQ a focal subject of discussion. This subject should not be engaged without an approach of love, a strong leading of the Holy Spirit and research on best practice when working with youth of the LGBTQ community. These sessions certainly provided a beginning conversation for future discussion with the members of the community of Faith at the table with members of the LGBTQ community and professional child counselors.

The Mount Ararat Church does not currently have group discussions on LGBTQ issues, however could benefit from future discussion both for the sake of our youth and that of members of the congregation who are members of this community.

It is the express desire of the researcher that the Mount Ararat Baptist Church allow further creation of the group sessions with girls throughout the youth ministry and possibly the Sunday School. Also, that the groups be held with a couple more sessions where the mothers and or guardians are invited to the discussion so that the warm hand off can take place from caring adult to parental custodian. In the sessions for the purpose of this thesis project the parents were invited to come to a pre-session as well as the ending session. This did not present an issue for any of the parents in this project and

actually the parents celebrated the groups and the relationships with caring adults that was formed. The parents even inquired of session continuation and the creation of groups for older young ladies and women.

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